THIS BOOK BELONGS TO

ROWLEY'S

CIRCULATING LIBRARY,

EDMONTON.

THE NEW PUBLICATIONS REGULARLY ADDED.

Terms of Subscription.

	£.	s.	d.
Yearly Subscribers, at	1	11	6
Half-yearly ditto	0	18	0
Quarterly ditto	0	10	0
Monthly ditto	0	5	0

will be accommodated with all the New Books, Magazines, Reviews, &c.

Subscribers by the year, £1. 1s.—Half-yearly ditto, 18s.—Quarterly ditto, 7s.—Monthly ditto, 3s. are entitled to Two Sets of Books at a time.

The money to be paid on the time of subscribing.

NON SUBSCRIBERS

Deposit the value of the Books (if required) and pay

For each Volume and every [illegible] the value of Four Shillings [illegible] 2d.
Above Four, and not exceeding [illegible] Seven Shillings [illegible] 3d.
Above Seven, and not exceeding [illegible] Twelve Shillings [illegible] 4d.

The Proprietor [illegible] that New Books will not be detained more than Three Days.

DITTO PAINTS SENT TO COPY.

A GREAT VARIETY OF FASHIONABLE MUSIC.

Perfumery, Toys, Dolls, Deep Tin Cashboxes, and Needle Cases, Cut Glass, Card Racks, and Scissors Handles.

Cutlery Ditto, and an extensive Assortment of Fancy Goods.

BOOKBINDING

in all its branches.

STATIONERY. DOCKET BOOKS RULED TO ANY PATTERN.

Drawing Paper, Bristol Boards, and Paste-boards.

Coloured and Fancy Gold Paper, Gold Borders, Gold and Tinsel Ornaments, &c. &c. in the greatest variety.

Ladies' and Gentlemen's Libraries furnished & repaired.

Magazines and Superior Publications regularly delivered.

Jane

ST. MARGARET's CAVE.

AN ANCIENT LEGEND.

Printed by J. Darling, Leadenhall-Street, London.

Jane

ST. MARGARET's CAVE.

AN ANCIENT LEGEND.

Printed by J. Darling, Leadenhall-Street, London.

ST. MARGARET'S CAVE;

OR,

THE NUN'S STORY.

An Ancient Legend.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY

ELIZABETH HELME,

AUTHOR OF

THE FARMER OF INGLEWOOD FOREST, PENITENT OF GODSTOW, DUNCAN AND PEGGY, ST. CLAIR OF THE ISLES, PILGRIM OF THE CROSS, LOUISA, OR COTTAGE ON THE MOOR, MODERN TIMES, ALBERT OF STRATHNAVERN, &c.

SECOND EDITION.

VOL. I.

London:

Printed at the Minerva Press for

A. K. NEWMAN AND CO. LEADENHALL-STREET.

1819.

INTRODUCTION.

In a delightful situation, at a short distance from Bremen, in Lower Saxony, at the commencement of the seventeenth century, stood an ancient, but richly endowed convent, dedicated to the Holy Virgin; and, at a further distance of a quarter of a mile, a monastery, which bore the name of St. Francis, endowed with equal munificence.

Though two centuries had elapsed since the founders of these buildings had been numbered with the dead,

yet they were still spoken of within the walls with reverence, and a certain number of masses celebrated monthly for the repose of their souls.

About the period first mentioned, the abbess of the sisterhood, who joined to a beneficent heart an active and enlightened mind, received into her house a middle-aged German lady, of high birth, who had lately become childless and a widow, her husband and only son having unfortunately fallen in a battle between France and the combined powers.

The baroness De Warminstroct, plunged in the deepest melancholy, and disgusted with the world, had resolved to devote the remainder of her days to religion, and for that purpose

purpose entered the convent of St. Mary, where, after the usual probation, she intended to take the veil.

Even the consolations of religion were long ineffectual to calm her sorrow. In vain did the pious sisterhood endeavour, by their lenient words and example, to fix her thoughts on subjects more applicable to the holy vocation she was about to enter: a slaughtered husband and son overpowered every other idea; and kneeling before the altar, while the pious sisters, wrapped in heavenly meditation, dropped the tear of contrition for real or fancied errors, hers flowed in torrents for the loss of those beloved objects on

whom all her earthly happiness had depended.

The abbess, who had judged that the excess of the baroness's grief must in time exhaust itself, long forbore to express those counsels which, she feared, would be unavailing; but disappointed in her expectation, she one morning requested the baroness's company in her apartment, when, after some preliminary discourse, she addressed her as follows: "My dear sister, I had hoped that, before this, your grief would have given way to that pious resignation with which we are taught it is our duty to receive all the trials of this life. The baron and your son, I am well informed,

formed, were just and religious men: they lost their lives in no unworthy cause, but in the duties which their country and fellow-citizens called upon them to fulfil; have you, therefore, any doubt, that their souls are not now enjoying that repose designed for the virtuous?"

"Assuredly not," answered the baroness. "My husband was among the best of men; my son the most dutiful and affectionate that ever blessed the wishes of a fond mother. —Oh!" added she, raising her eyes to heaven, and crossing herself, "may my soul, when called forth from its earthly mansion, be equally pure as theirs!—then shall we meet again in never-ending felicity."

"If such your belief," answered the abbess, "wherefore this selfish sorrow? It is unjust and sinful. For a moment raise your thoughts to that bliss we trust they are enjoying, and let your tears give way to thankfulness, that they have so worthily fulfilled their earthly career. To-morrow will we celebrate a mass for them, and daily will we remember them in our orisons; so may your spirit rest in equal peace as that we pray for them."

The ensuing day high mass was celebrated for the baron De Warminstroct and his son. Bending before the sacred altar, the prayers of the chaste sisters ascended to heaven; the spirit of the baroness appeared raised

raised above itself, and resignation took place of despair in her bosom.

As the baroness recovered from the stupor into which her grief had at first plunged her, the abbess became warmly attached to her. Their understanding and pursuits were similar, and though the first had passed the years of her youth in the gaiety and splendour of the world, and the second almost the whole of hers in the uniformity of a convent-life, yet congenial dispositions rendered them pleasing companions to each other.

One evening, as they were seated in social converse, the baroness said —" My dear sister Clare, I have frequently wondered how a woman,

possessed of your understanding, accomplishments, and, if I may judge from what time has spared, person, came to devote herself to a voluntary seclusion from all the gaieties of life: surely some youthful disappointment, or severe affliction, must have influenced you to adopt a measure in general so contrary to the inclinations of a female who must have been universally admired?"

"You judge erroneously," replied the abbess; "my seclusion was entirely from choice: but you will cease to wonder, when I inform you that I have been accustomed to a convent-life since my early years, having been entirely educated with an aunt, who was also abbess of this institution.

tion. Our family, which is that of De Hoffman, was the first who so richly endowed this convent; they rebuilt it from the foundation of one greatly fallen to decay, and also entirely founded that dedicated to St. Francis, reserving to themselves the power of nominating the superior of each—a distinction which, for more than two centuries, has been conferred on descendants of the family. My aunt was tenderly attached to me, and I can truly say she possessed my warmest affection; for my mother dying when I was but a few months old, my father's only sister, the abbess, took me under her care, the count De Hoffman having no other daughter—but five sons, who

were afterwards disposed
to their rank and fortune.

"My aunt, although I
she dreaded a separation
when I was eighteen, refu
me profess myself, until I
passed some months in th
where, if I found myself mor
than in the convent, she in
should remain.—'Beware,' s
good and respectable woman,
you bring repugnance into
treat designed only for thos
willingly forsake the vanities o
Thirty years,' said she, 'have I
superior of this institution, and n
during that period, have I suf
one person take the vows, who I
not conceive embraced retirem

fi

ing so-
hered to
cumed.
I sac-
, wha
high
w bet.
of the
a re-
uthed
urs.
was ap-
ay fa-
mous
a el-
holy

sented: but my mind had taken the bent that was to determine my future life. The bustle of the world wearied me, and the idea of marriage, as it must for ever cut me off from the asylum of my infancy, disgusted me; I therefore anticipated the happy time when I should return to my beloved St. Mary's.

"At length it arrived; my aunt, as also the sisters, received me with rapture: but their pleasure, if I may judge by my own feelings, must be far inferior to mine; my heart appeared to have returned to its natural home, and I strictly resolved never more to quit it. My aunt did not, however, for some years, suffer me to take the vows, though she spared

spared no pains to qualify me for her successor.

"To shorten an uninteresting detail, at twenty-two I was suffered to embrace the life I most preferred; and at the age of thirty-six, I succeeded my venerable relation, who, much advanced in years, and high in the affection of all who knew her, died, surrounded by the sisters of the house, who, while they sung a *requiem* to her departing spirit, bathed her revered body with their tears.

"Some short time after, I was appointed abbess, not only by my family, but also by the unanimous voice of the whole sisterhood, the elders of whom regarded me as their child, the younger as their sister—

an

an affection that, I thank Heaven, has remained unbroken, this only change taking place, that I now regard myself as sister to the elders, and a mother to the youthful."

The baroness returned her thanks to the abbess for the communication she had favoured her with.—"Your little narrative," said she, "has indeed no romantic event to arrest the attention, but it has what is far more praiseworthy—the good and the evil lay before you, and you wisely chose the first. Ah!" continued she, sighing deeply, "had such been my choice, how much sorrow should I have escaped!"

"Perhaps not," replied the abbess: "education, and affection for

my

my aunt, had given me that decided inclination for a convent that nothing could remove, and therefore it was proper to gratify it, as its end was virtuous; but I am far from thinking that those who devote themselves to a monastic life are more acceptable to their Creator than those who encounter the turmoils of the world: on the contrary, the first appear prevented by their situation from committing gross vices, while the latter, if they rise superior to the vanities and temptations of the world, seem as gold purified by fire, and consequently have a double claim to the approbation of their great Judge."

"I readily agree with you in that case," answered the baroness; "but how

how few are there who have strength of mind to withstand the fascinating glare that surrounds them!"

"Many, I should hope; but in this mortal state all are prone to error, and true repentance with our merciful Creator obliterates our sins. The founder of this convent and the neighbouring monastery, though in the latter part of his life he was regarded as almost above mortality, had erred grossly in his early years. The annals of the family at that period may, perhaps, beguile you of some uneasy hours, and if so, you are welcome to peruse them."

The baroness expressed her acknowledgments, after which she added—"It is now more than two centuries

turies since this convent was founded, as expressed upon the marble in the choir. I am of the sixth generation since that period; and as it may be interesting to you, I will inform you how I became possessed of the minute parts of my ancestors' history.

"I was about nineteen, when a daughter of one of the younger branches of our family was admitted into our community, on which occasion all the jewels and gems of the convent were called forth to decorate the altar. One large diamond cross was alone wanting, and for some time sought in vain, until my aunt, by chance, happened to recollect that she had deposited it in an iron chest in the conservatory, and giving me the

the keys, desired me to search there. On opening the chest, I speedily found the cross; but my attention was far more attracted by several large rolls of parchment, which, by the superscription, I found to be annals of our family. I was no sooner alone with my aunt, than I expressed my curiosity to be informed of the contents, when she replied as follows: —'My dear girl, you have my entire permission to examine those writings as much as you think proper; but I must inform you beforehand, that I fear your labour will be unavailing, for I have already, some years ago, bewildered myself among them without effect, though I must confess that in many parts they greatly interested

terested me: but from the skins not being numbered, the trouble would be infinite to procure a regular clue.'

"Satisfied with this permission, my curiosity smoothed all difficulties. I brought the parchments to my chamber, and had the perseverance to labour twelve whole months at the arrangement of them.

"The language, as you may well suppose, was very abstruse, and time, in many places, had obliterated the characters; but having once succeeded in connecting and perusing the manuscript, I resolved to render it as intelligible as possible, and therefore transcribed it in the form it now bears. My aunt was delighted at my success, particularly as it threw

a light

a light on many events respecting our family, that time had sunk in oblivion.

"It may, however, be necessary to inform you, that it is not merely the annals of my ancestors, but also of an ancient and noble English family called Fitzwalter, and that great part of the events this manuscript contains happened in that country."

With these words, the abbess unlocked a box, and presented a large parcel of papers to the baroness, who no sooner found herself alone, than removing the envelope, she found the promised history.

Written upon the first Page of the Manuscript.

Oh ye that may hereafter peruse these pages, pray for the repose of those you find therein mentioned! avoid their errors, and take example by their sufferings: so shall your spirits rest in peace.

Written on the second Page.

Annals of the Families of De Hoffman and Fitzwalter, written at the request of that truly pious matron, sister Adelaide, first abbess of this convent, on the new foundation, Anno Domini 1512.

St. Margaret's Cave.

CHAPTER I.

THREE miles from the sea-coast, in the county of Northumberland, on a bold eminence, and surrounded by a rich valley, stood the ancient castle of Fitzwalter. The western side of the extensive domain was open to a view of the country, the north and south bounded by rising woods, and the east by the sea, which was prevented from overflowing the shore by the lofty and tremendous rocks which formed an impenetrable barrier to the coast. The fertile parts of the valley

valley were interspersed with cottages appertaining to the vassals of the baron Fitzwalter; but, on the side towards the mountains, all was dreary, wild, and desolate, the only inhabitants being the birds of prey that had, undisturbed, built their nests and fixed their kingdom there for ages immemorial. On the land side of one of the hills was a deep and spacious cavern, hollowed by the hand of the great architect, Nature, closed at the opening by mountain and forest shrubs, and gloomily enlightened by an aperture in the rock, at least two hundred feet from the surface. This recess was called St. Margaret's Cave, but from what cause had long since been forgotten, but was conjectured to have taken rise from its being nearly adjoining to the ruins of an ancient chapel, dedicated to that saint; though the peasantry of the surrounding country had a tradition among them, that the chapel had taken its name from the cave, as a lady had there found the

murdered

murdered body of her lover, and erected the chapel to celebrate constant masses for the repose of his soul.

This building had probably suffered at the same time as the monastery at Landisfern, or Holy Island, by the sacrilegious ravages of the Danes and other barbarous nations, from which period it had apparently been abandoned. Such had been the solidity of its original structure, that, though so many centuries had passed since its first desolation, yet time had since done but little toward its final destruction. The nave, the sacristy, the altar, several tombs, and the surrounding cloisters, were yet in a state of preservation, though the accumulated dust of ages, together with fragments of broken and mouldering stone, in a great measure defaced them. Pious pilgrims and holy friars of different orders, who travelled through the country, seldom passed within a short distance, without turning aside to offer up their prayers at the an-

cient chapel; but as to the country people around, though they held the spot in the utmost veneration, yet their respect was mingled with a dread, which made them rather shun than seek it; and if any dire necessity, as stray cattle or other cause, obliged them on an evening to pass by, the roaring and shrill winds that re-echoed from the hollows of the surrounding mountains seemed to their scared fancies mingled with the shrieks of wandering spirits, whose souls were doomed to suffer till they were cleansed from the errors of their mortal life. With minds thus alarmed, even the stone columns that supported the cloisters frequently to their bewildered sight appeared to assume human shapes, and to advance toward them; when, regardless of all but supernatural objects, their losses were instantly forgotten, and they would fly with the speed of greyhounds, nor once look back till home appeared in view. There the goodwife, with mute amazement,

amazement, would listen to the dreadful relation, and the children crowding round would be thrice bidden before they would dare venture to reach the homely supper, and when at length dismissed to rest, were sure to repeat an additional Ave Maria, till wearied nature was overcome, and their fears were lost in sleep.

The baron Fitzwalter, lord of the domain and owner of the castle, was advanced in years. He had retired from public life during the reign of Edward the Fourth. His family consisted only of his lady and son; but his dependents were numerous, for he was not of a disposition to retrench in aught from the ancient splendour of his ancestors, though at his inheriting the estate he found it heavily incumbered.

William Fitzwalter, the only son of the baron, was generous, noble, valiant, and humane: he had received his education from the best masters, and, at the age of eighteen, had so strongly pressed

the baron his father, that he at length consented to suffer him to extend his knowledge by visiting foreign countries. Before he attained the age of twenty, he had travelled over part of France and Germany, these countries being then at peace with England. In Germany, he had formed a friendship with a young nobleman, called De Hoffman, eldest son of the count of that name, and who had been his travelling companion during the whole tour.

De Hoffman was eight years older than Fitzwalter, and to the knowledge and perseverance of the German added the fascinating sprightliness of a Frenchman—a character which, though totally dissimilar from that of Fitzwalter, who was reflective and serious, did not prevent them from being warmly attached to each other.

The most common topic of discourse at this period (1485) was the death of the young princes, Edward the Fourth's children,

children, and the usurpation of their uncle, the duke of Gloucester, now Richard the Third. Though the manner of their death was then unknown, yet there was room for the most foul suspicion; and all good men did not fail to join in one wish, that ample retribution might fall on the head of the tyrant.

De Hoffman and Fitzwalter had entered into these sentiments with all the warmth and energy of noble and generous minds; it is therefore not to be wondered at, that in passing through Normandy, where they became acquainted with the earl of Richmond, they should readily offer themselves as volunteers in his cause. They in consequence embarked with him from Harfleur for England. Supported by a good conscience, brave men, resolved to conquer or die, seldom fail of success—an observation which was verified in the battle of Bosworth-field, where the blood of the

tyrant was shed—a poor but just oblation for the murder of his brother's children.

In the contest of that memorable day, De Hoffman and Fitzwalter had shewn themselves among the most conspicuous, and fearless of danger, had rushed into the thickest of the fight; so that, the battle being ended, as the earl of Richmond, then loudly proclaimed Henry the Seventh, tendered his thanks to all, he particularly noticed them.

"My noble volunteers," said he, "I joy to acknowledge thus publicly the obligations I owe you.—This brave youth," continued he, laying his hand on Fitzwalter's shoulder, "once this day, at his own imminent hazard, repossessed me with a weapon, when mine was struck down; and in the rage of the battle, did the swords of both frequently rush between me and danger."

"My lord," answered Fitzwalter, modestly,

destly, "you overrate my services: be cause of this day would make even cowards brave."

"The courage and manner of [illegible] yourself and friend, I [illegible] may judge from what I have witnessed," replied Henry, "reflect the highest honour upon the noble houses from whence you sprung; and much do I hope you will still continue with me, that I may never repay my thanks than it is possible to express in the transport of this happy hour."

"My gracious lord," interposed Mr. Hoffman, "though a German born, yet I can sincerely say that you have no subject present who more warm wishes for your success than myself. I am grieved to decline your grace's kindness; but I am a truant—no paternal consent sanctioned my coming, and even yesternight, by a private hand, did I learn my father's uneasiness respecting my safety. I depart, therefore, my lord, with to-morrow's dawn, to fulfil my first duty; but be as-

sured, should you hereafter need the weak arm of De Hoffman, you shall find it as ready as heretofore."

"But your young friend," answered Henry, pointing to Fitzwalter—"he, I trust, has no duty to fulfil, and can therefore accompany us."

"My noble lord," replied Fitzwalter, "it is now more than two years since I left my paternal home. The baron, my father, is much advanced in years. Rumour will doubtless bear to him the tidings of my return; I will therefore first hasten to him, to remove any fears he may have on my account, and afterwards with pleasure fulfil those claims my king and country may have upon me."

"Fare ye well then both," said Henry. "If aught in my power can serve you, demand it freely. I would I had some memorial to give you of my friendship! But take the sword you so bravely put into my hands; it shall be the hostage of

of Henry the Seventh for the debts of the earl of Richmond."

So saying, he presented them his sword. No jewel decorated the weapon, but the gift was precious, as it came from a king and a conqueror.

With these words he left them, and the young friends, after taking an affectionate farewell of each other, separated —De Hoffman for the nearest port to embark for Germany, and Fitzwalter for his father's castle in Northumberland.

CHAPTER II.

During Fitzwalter's absence, many arrangements had taken place at the castle. The good old baron, whose generosity had greatly increased his difficulties, had been necessitated to have recourse to a rich knight, named Mountford, who, in consideration of receiving a mortgage on nearly half the baron's domain, had advanced a sum necessary to liquidate his debts.

Mountford's whole life had been a continued scene of scraping together, and the produce was now designed at once to enrich and ennoble his daughter Edith, who was his only child. With this view, he cultivated the baron's friendship with the

the utmost care. The family of Fitzwalter was as great as his utmost ambition could wish, and fame spoke highly of its future heir; he therefore conceived that, could he succeed in forming an union between the young people, all his views respecting Edith would be gratified, and he should be also conferring a favour on Fitzwalter, by not only clearing his estate, but also rendering him one of the richest barons in the kingdom.

As men plant trees which they never live to see flourish, and architects plan buildings which they never live to execute, so did death snatch Mountford from seeing his favourite scheme completed. Three months had scarcely elapsed since he had taken the mortgage, and in exulting fancy had considered his daughter as the future baroness of Fitzwalter, when he was seized with a mortal sickness, which in a few days terminated his existence. Firm to his purpose, he in his will requested the baron Fitzwalter

to become the guardian of his daughter, whom he constituted his joint heiress with William Fitzwalter, on consideration that the youth should espouse her before he attained the age of twenty-five years; previous to which, if he married any other, or at that period declined her hand, he forfeited all right to the bequest, and the mortgage on the baron's estate remained in full force.

As Mountford's family, though comparatively obscure to that of the baron, brought no disgrace with it, lord Fitzwalter was not displeased with the idea of being so easily quit of a debt that must effectually have impoverished his successor. Edith was in consequence removed to the castle, and placed under the care of the baroness, till such time as Fitzwalter should come home, and learn the good fortune that awaited him.

Fitzwalter, when he returned from the battle of Bosworth-field, had just attained his twentieth year. In person and

and mind he was all the fondest parents could desire; nor did the fame of his courage, which had already reached them, fail to enhance his father's pleasure as he embraced him.

After some few days given to rejoicing, the baron informed his son of the arrangement Mountford had made in his favour, concluding his discourse by adding, that he trusted no untoward circumstance would frustrate the hopes he had conceived to see it completed.

Fitzwalter listened to the baron with a respectful silence; then replied—" I must confess, my lord, that you have astonished me. To the fortune of Mountford I have no claim, nor do I wish to inherit it; and, on my own account, should not hesitate a moment to decline it. But," continued he, smiling, " as he was kind enough to allow me a probation of five years, and you, my good father, so earnestly appear to wish it, I will

will take time to consider more fully on the subject."

With this reply the baron was obliged to be satisfied; and, as Edith was not yet seventeen, he agreed with the baroness that it would be most prudent to leave the event to time, hoping that the partiality which young people frequently contract by being constant companions might take place between them. Whether the baron's hopes might have been realized is impossible to conjecture; but an event happened at this period, which rendered it very improbable, if not impossible, that an union between Fitzwalter and Edith should ever take place.

Sir John Stanley, a poor but noble knight, and an old friend of the baron, before his death wrote a pathetic letter to lord Fitzwalter, requesting him, for the sake of the Blessed Virgin, to take upon him the protection of his orphan daughter. This request, so solemnly made,

made, was not to be refused; and, two months after Fitzwalter's return, the sorrowing Blanch Stanley became an inmate of the castle.

This young woman, though poor in worldly estimation, was infinitely richer than the wealthy Edith in all the estimable qualities of the mind. Young Fitzwalter had felt no predilection for his intended wife, but the mild unassuming Blanch was no sooner seen than beloved; and, as art formed no part of his character, this passion was speedily visible to the whole family. This event perplexed and distressed the baron beyond measure; and, after various resolves on the subject, he determined to throw himself on the duty and affection of his son. He represented to him, in the most lively terms, the ruin that must ensue, should he persist in his inclination for Blanch, as Edith Mountford, once of age, would not fail to claim, in case of his non-performance of her father's will;

the

the payment of the sums advanced, in default of which, the half of his fortune would be inevitably lost.

Fitzwalter listened with the utmost attention; and though, on his own account, he would have disregarded a decrease of fortune, yet when he considered the attachment his father bore to the ancient splendour of his house, he shuddered to take a step which he feared might have the most fatal consequences.

"If I understood you aright, my lord," said he, "when we before conversed on this subject, the time appointed was on my attaining my twenty-fifth year, at which period I will give my answer. Time may fortunately make Mountford's daughter not so passive in an event that so nearly concerns her happiness, and it may become our mutual interest to break those bonds, which even paternal power had no right to forge."

This reply the baron related to the lady Fitzwalter, requesting her to say

to

to Edith, who had not failed to remark Fitzwalter's partiality to Blanch, that his son by no means declined the honour of her hand, but from unavoidable causes must delay to request it till the time appointed by her father.

Edith was not of a disposition to suffer what she considered an insult calmly; but as, in this case, she had no appeal, she put on the outward semblance of satisfaction, though she, in truth, felt the highest indignation at the disregard shewn at once to her person and fortune. By a thousand mortifications, she however contrived to revenge herself on Blanch, who had also much to endure from the baron and his lady, who regarded her as the only obstacle to their son's future fortune, and would not have failed to have discarded her, had they not feared that, by such a step, Fitzwalter would have thought himself bound in honour to take her into his own protection.

tion. Though this consideration was powerful enough to oblige them to retain Blanch at the castle, yet the humiliations she daily underwent were not lost on Fitzwalter, who with all the eloquence of love long pleaded in vain for her to leave a mansion where she was so inhospitably treated. He at length succeeded, and they eloped, their only companions being a respectable woman, named Alice, who had been nurse to Blanch, and a favourite domestic of Fitzwalter's, called David.

These events had filled a space of two years since Fitzwalter's return home, and so powerful had been the attachment he felt for Blanch, even from her first arrival at the castle, that he had never, during that period, even availed himself of the request made him by the king; nor yet had he visited his much-esteemed friend, De Hoffman, though repeatedly pressed by that young noble-

man,

man, who, by his father's death, now inherited his estates, had been married nearly two years, and was the father of one child.

CHAP-

CHAPTER III.

THE baron's vexation at the elopement of his son is better imagined than described. He had no doubt but he was married to Blanch, and caused the most exact inquiries to be made in all possible quarters; but in vain—no news of the kind he so much dreaded transpired; and his fears somewhat subsided, as the ruin of his friend's daughter appeared to him, of the two, a less evil, than the destruction of the splendour of his ancient house.

At length he received a letter from Fitzwalter. It came from Germany, where he now learned, for the first time, the

the runaways had taken refuge. The letter was to this purport:—

"Health and peace attend the lord and lady Fitzwalter, if that wish may be received from a truant son, whose only excuse is, that fatal necessity urged him to take a step against which his heart recoils, as it not only involves the beloved of his soul in disgrace, but has made a breach between him and his ever-honoured parents.

"To the deceased Edward Mountford, as also to his daughter Edith, Fitzwalter confesses he owes much obligation; but paternal authority was too far extended, when it imposed, as a duty on his daughter, a contract which ought to be free. If Edith, therefore, has any incentive that may lead her to wish to break those bonds that bind her to Fitzwalter, she may rest assured, that, at the appointed time, Fitzwalter will fulfil every obliga-

tion

tion that Edward Mountford has a right to demand of him.

"WILLIAM FITZWALTER."

This letter afforded but little satisfaction to the baron, who however informed Edith that she must regard the conduct of Fitzwalter as merely a slip of youth, as in his letter he had testified his intention of returning, at the end of the appointed three years, to fulfil her father's will.

Edith possessed too much art to discover her displeasure openly. She had felt a strong partiality for Fitzwalter, and a no less powerful one for the rank and title of baroness, and was firmly resolved, when opportunity offered, if not to gratify her love, at least to satiate her vengeance.

The baron, who had still his fears that Fitzwalter had privately married Blanch, no sooner learned that they were in

Germany, than he dispatched a friar to make all possible inquiries. But these were as fruitless as those before made in England, the only news he returned with being, that Fitzwalter and Blanch lived in a small house on De Hoffman's estate, in a very retired manner. As no further information could be procured, the lord Fitzwalter was obliged to rest satisfied, though he did not fail to write to his son, whom he reproached in the most bitter terms for his disgraceful flight, and the shame he had brought not only on the name of Stanley, but on that of Fitzwalter.

Blanch, in the mean time, felt all the pangs that a susceptible mind endures under the imputation of guilt, and though she loved Fitzwalter with the sincerest affection, drooped with grief when she reflected on the opprobrium that hung over her. An event which, in other circumstances, would have given her the highest satisfaction, also contri-

buted

buted to increase her uneasiness—she found herself in a state to become a mother, and shuddered with horror that imputed shame should fall upon her innocent offspring.

Fitzwalter, who knew no happiness equal to her peace and satisfaction, would have braved every consequence on this occasion; but, with a firmness that was not to be conquered by persuasion, she refused to make any change in the arrangement they had first formed, saying—"It shall not be: the time may yet arrive, when the world shall own that Blanch Stanley did not mistake when she confided in William Fitzwalter's honour."

As strong impressions during our waking hours never fail to influence our nightly dreams, Blanch's thoughts were still active, though her body slept. In one of these midnight visions, she thought her father, in the pale livery of the grave, stood before her, and looking upon her with

with a frowning aspect, said—" The name of Stanley should be without reproach; this stain must be done away." —" Ah, father!" she thought she replied, " how can it be obliterated, without involving my beloved lord, and his noble father, in ruin?"—" By death!" answered he, and vanished.

The anguish caused by this dream awoke all the fears of Fitzwalter, and again he conjured her, in the most tender and solemn manner, to permit him to take the only step necessary to restore her to that estimation and respect she so well merited, and was entitled to.

This offer was again rejected with the greatest obstinacy.—" No," said she, as she conversed on the subject with her favourite Alice, " never will I consent to be the ruin of the man I love—never shall the baron curse the unhappy Blanch, and her unoffending child. Time alone, my dear Alice, can smooth all obstacles.

Should Heaven, of its mercy, take the baron to itself (which the Holy Virgin forefend that I should wish!)" continued she, crossing herself, "my Fitzwalter would, I know, disregard the loss of half his fortune. In that case we must learn to be provident. You, Alice, would teach me housewifery; and for my child, should it be a son, if with his good sword he could not carve his fortune, by my life I would swear, he neither partook of the blood of Stanley nor Fitzwalter."

"I wish from my soul," answered Alice, "if that wish can be expressed without sin, that the infant may be a boy, though, to confess the truth, I on my own account should feel more attachment to a girl, as it would remind me of your infancy."

"Oh, Alice! I shudder at the bare idea of a daughter; a girl, perhaps, with all her mother's weakness—with all her mother's——"

"Rectitude

"Rectitude and forbearance," interrupted Alice—"with that honour that can unshaken bear——"

The entrance of Fitzwalter at that moment prevented more discourse, and Blanch, who well knew that he watched her every look and action, affected a cheerfulness her heart was far from feeling.

Time, and the unwearied attention of Alice, the affection of Fitzwalter, and the kindness of the count De Hoffman and his family, had begun, in some measure, to divert the thoughts of Blanch from the dream that had caused her so much alarm, when a second, equally forcible, made an impression that nothing could remove. She thought herself in the baron's castle in Northumberland, Fitzwalter seated by her side, and on her bosom a smiling infant. On a sudden Edith Mountford rushed in, her eyes glaring fire, and her hand armed with a dagger, which in a moment she plunged

into the heart of Fitzwalter, from whence drawing it, reeking with his blood, she aimed it at the infant. With more than mortal speed, Blanch thought she flew over hills and valleys to save her child; but vain would have been her endeavours to escape, for her implacable enemy followed close at her heels, had not a radiant female rushed between them, and with a wand she held, rendering the furious Mountford motionless, spoke thus: —" As the gossamer flies before the wind, so doth the power of man before the Most High. Thus far mayest thou go, but no further. That infant will I protect from thy malice: in the Cave of St. Margaret shall it find safety, and under its rude arched roof make thy proud heart shrink, even in the lofty Castle of Fitzwalter."

The strong emotion of Blanch, even in her sleep, awoke Fitzwalter, who truly judged that it was again some vision that disturbed her.—" Blanch, my love," cried

cried he, "awake!—no one shall injure thee—Fitzwalter is thy guard: dreams, thou knowest, are but chimeras, arising from a disturbed imagination."

Blanch, thus tenderly awakened, and convinced of his safety, collected her scattered spirits, but in the morning related every circumstance, with a solemnity which implied that the dream had made a strong impression.

Fitzwalter listened with a smile.—"My beloved," said he, "how long have I been so greatly fallen in thy opinion, that thou shouldst, even for a moment, fear that I am doomed to die ingloriously by a woman's hand? Thy infant too, the child of Fitzwalter, with all due deference to St. Margaret, shall never be reduced to seek a sanctuary in her cell."

"My gracious master," interrupted Alice, "I pray your pardon, but you speak irreligiously: the great, as well as the poor, are subject to the vicissitudes of this life—not that I think belief is al-

ways to be placed upon dreams, and St. Mary forefend that this should come true! but stabs are sometimes given without daggers, and infants pursued by enemies, who, though they dare not strike at life, may be equally dangerous. What I would advise is, to be upon your guard; it is always good to be wary. Who knows but the sainted spirit of the old chapel, for wise purposes, might give this warning?"

"My good mother," said Fitzwalter, "thou speakest like an oracle. If my Blanch should give me an angel like herself, we will choose St. Margaret for her tutelary saint; but if a boy, cast in the rude mould of his father, I must be pardoned if I prefer St. George for his patron."

CHAP-

CHAPTER IV.

THREE days after the dream that had caused Blanch so much terror, she was seized with the pangs of childbirth. Her labour was long and severe, and filled all around her with the most serious fears for her safety. Resignation and patience were only to be seen on the features of the sufferer, who on the second evening gave birth to a daughter. For many hours the exhausted Blanch lay with scarcely a symptom of life, during which Fitzwalter did not for a moment leave her side, alternately regarding her and the infant with that speechless anguish which real sorrow can alone feel. At

length, somewhat collected, she called for Fitzwalter and Alice, who instantly coming forward, in a faint voice she addressed them thus:—"My beloved and dearest friends, I feel with undeniable certainty that my life draws near its close, and while strength and understanding are left me, I would fain fulfil some few duties, which, by the mercy of Heaven, may help to obliterate the sins of my mortal life."

"Oh, Blanch!" interrupted Fitzwalter, his voice choked with anguish, "thou hast no sins, thou spotless innocence! The cursed affection of the wretched Fitzwalter plunges thee into an untimely grave."

"Call not thy affection cursed, Fitzwalter," answered she, her eyes turning quick from him to the infant which lay by her side; "I trust it will be blessed. Thy love was my pride, my glory; and if in heaven spirits think, I will remember

ber thy truth and honour. Thou," continued she, "wilt remember me, when thou cherishest thy babe."

Fitzwalter groaned, but could not speak. Blanch, through weakness, made a long pause, until at length recovering herself, she continued—"Call me, I pray you, a priest: good father John will willingly attend me. Let him take my confession, and baptize my child—that sight will give me pleasure. Let her be called Margaret."

A servant was dispatched to the abbey of St. Francis, to summon the father, while another hastened to the count De Hoffman's castle to inform him of the danger of Blanch. The count and his lady immediately followed the messenger to Fitzwalter's dwelling. On their arrival, the priest was with his penitent, who having made her confession, desired that De Hoffman and the countess might enter. It was no time for congratulations; the lady, with a look that express-

ed far more than words, took her place by the side of the dying Blanch, and pressing her hand between both hers, at length said—" You wish your infant to receive the sacrament of baptism; the count and myself are come to entreat to be sponsors, if you will accept us."

Blanch looked fixedly at the countess, raised her hand to her lips, and beckoning the priest forward, in an almost exhausted voice requested him to name her child.

The priest opened his book. The water, the salt, the oil, and tapers, were prepared, when the father asked, as it was a daughter, who was the second sponsor; for in the confusion of the moment it had been forgotten that two females were necessary.

" There is a respectable woman who, by her tears on this occasion, will, I should judge, worthily fulfil that trust," said the countess, pointing to Alice, who stood weeping at a respectful distance.

" My

"My good, my second mother," said Blanch, addressing Alice, "you hear the countess: will you not at this solemn moment answer for my child?"

"Alas!" answered Alice, "powerless as I am, I will answer for her with my life, and die to protect her: but I am not worthy to be sponsor to my lord's child, nor yet to stand by the side of the count and countess De Hoffman."

The countess stepped forward, took Alice by the hand, and said—"If, my good friend, it is true what we are taught, and of the truth of which I have no doubt, that there are no distinctions in heaven, how pitiful must that mind be who can make any on this occasion!"

This point arranged, the priest performed the ceremony, and named the infant Margaret. Blanch's spirits appeared recruited by the sight; she thanked the count and his lady, and entreated them to comfort Fitzwalter; then turning to the priest she said—"My good father,

as you have written down my confession, I pray you take a copy: the original keep in your own hands, and give the other to Fitzwalter."

Blanch appeared exhausted. The good father withdrew to obey her commands, and in less than an hour had transcribed it. Blanch signed first, and the count, his lady, Alice, and the priest, witnessed the signature, after which they took their leave.

Blanch, for some hours, was so placid that Fitzwalter gave way to the rapturous idea that she would yet recover: but this hope only served to increase the weight of sorrow that was to follow, for on awaking from what both himself and Alice thought a refreshing sleep, they saw with anguish that the pangs of death were upon her.

"Yet a little while," said she, "and this fragile body shall return to its native clay, and this warm heart forget its earthly attachments. Listen, then, Fitzwalter,

walter, to my voice. Paternal disobedience is a grievous sin: who knows but it has drawn down this heavy punishment upon us? With my dying breath let me request you to be reconciled to your father."

Fitzwalter attempted to speak, but waving her hand, she continued—"Interrupt me not, I conjure you: my time is nearly expired; my last thoughts and prayers are for your happiness.—Oh, Alice! be a mother to my child.—Fitzwalter, to you I need not recommend her. Secrecy and mystery may be the best safeguards of her infancy. I pray you, request the sisters of the convent of St. Mary to admit my body into their holy ground. I entreat you pray for me———"

A convulsive spasm for a few minutes stopped her utterance. Alice dropped on her knees, whilst Fitzwalter, with almost frantic energy, threw himself by her side, and supported her in his arms.

"Oh,

"Oh, Fitzwalter!" said the expiring Blanch, collecting her small remains of strength to articulate, "conquer this unavailing grief: we shall, thou knowest, meet again. The pangs of death are not so hard to bear as parting with thee." As she spoke, she rested her cold cheek on his, and paused a moment for breath; then continued—"In thy arms, where I could have lived most happy, let me die, my friend—my love—my lord—my———" As she spoke, she drew her breath hard between each word, and bowing her head, expired on the bosom of Fitzwalter.

Fitzwalter's grief for this loss found vent in neither words nor tears; it was that silent sorrow that preys upon the heart, and, like a secret and unsuspected enemy, undermines the foundation of life, before it is conjectured to have injured it.

The friendship of the family of De Hoffman, in this distress, was of the utmost

most service. The count, to a strong understanding, joined an active and generous mind; and whatever faults might fall to his share, at least a manly and disinterested friendship, with a warm and benevolent heart, was not among the number.

The character of the countess was less lively than that of her husband. To the most exquisite feminine beauty she added a mind so noble, reflective, pious, and chaste, that could every thought of her bosom have been visible, not one would have raised any emotion but respect, love, and admiration.

De Hoffman endeavoured to divert his friend's melancholy, by alternately exerting his understanding and his liveliness. The countess's consolations flowed all from piety, and those delivered in a voice so soft and persuasive, that Fitzwalter's grief was frequently charmed to peace, and his mind raised from earthly to heavenly objects.

A year

A year had passed since the death of Blanch, when an express from England arrived at De Hoffman's castle; it was from the baron Fitzwalter, requesting his son's attendance, as his health was in the most imminent danger. Fitzwalter immediately procured a small vessel, and, accompanied by Alice and his child, left Germany. The countess would fain have persuaded him to leave them in her care, but the young Margaret had already made herself so warm an interest in her father's heart, that he could not without pain resolve to quit her.

On reaching England, he placed Alice and her young charge in the cottage of David's wife, as he could rely on her fidelity, and proceeded to the dwelling of the baron.

He found his father's health greatly impaired. Added to the infirmities of age, he had in his mind also suffered severely, from being reduced to make retrenchments in his usual hospitable mode of

of living; for even his former difficulties had not yet taught him prudence. The baron, his lady, and Edith Mountford, received Fitzwalter with distinguished kindness, as in all probability they had concerted before his arrival; for, strange and repugnant as such a step must appear to a feeling or delicate mind, Edith's first wish was, even yet, to become the wife of Fitzwalter.

The baron's health still continued in an uncertain and declining state, and Fitzwalter had not been at home more than three months when he lost his mother. Before her death, with all the energy of a dying parent, she conjured him to take the only step that could save himself and his father from ruin, and by a marriage with Edith, preserve to his noble house its ancient possessions.

Fitzwalter replied with duty and filial tenderness. His affections, he said, were buried in the grave of Blanch, and though he would sacrifice his life to extricate

tricate his father from pecuniary difficulties, yet he could not resolve to pass his life with a woman totally indifferent to him, nor yet to deceive her with promises of affection which he never more could feel. Firm in this resolution, the baroness died without the satisfaction she required.

Fitzwalter's utmost wish was to keep his father from experiencing a material change of fortune during his life; and if he survived him, he resolved to yield to the creditors the full amount of their demands, bestow on his Margaret the remainder, and for himself, in the service of his country to seek a new fortune, or to find a glorious death.

CHAP-

CHAPTER V.

In spite of Fitzwalter's resolution, his plan proved abortive. In less than three months after his mother's death, he saw his father surrounded with difficulties that nothing but wealth could remove. Long did he struggle with his repugnance, which at length gave way to his father's tears, and with a beating heart and faltering voice he consented that the baron should propose him as a husband to Edith at the end of the ensuing six months.

Little flattering as was this proposal, Edith accepted it. Fitzwalter, as may be readily surmised, was no warm wooer; he however treated her with respectful attention,

attention, and having passed two of the six requested months at the castle, declared that he had a strong inclination to visit the capital for the remaining period, before the close of which he would return and fulfil his engagement.

This plan was by no means agreeable to either the baron or Edith; yet neither doubted his honour, and therefore with the better grace yielded to his inclination.

Fitzwalter was not expected to return till near the time appointed for the marriage; but to the surprise of not only the baron but Edith, he reached Northumberland a full month before the period agreed upon. What yet more astonished them than even his appearance was the strange manner in which he was accompanied. At his departure he was attended by only his servant David, who now, on his return, rode in the same line as his master, and assisted in securing a third person, who, tied upon a horse, rode between

between them. The prisoner was a young man of a handsome and commanding appearance; but the wildness of his eyes and the distraction of his features plainly shewed his mind was at variance with itself, and that he laboured under that most dreadful of all human maladies, madness.

On reaching the castle of the baron, Fitzwalter entreated his father's permission to confine the stranger in one of the remote apartments, saying he was his dear friend and constant companion some years before, when he studied the languages under a Benedictine at York—that he was a valiant and noble gentleman, but unfortunately had no relative living, who would in this distressful state take the charge upon them.

It has been before observed, that the baron wanted neither hospitality nor generosity, he therefore immediately acquiesced, calling some of his dependents to take upon them the charge of the stranger.

ger. This kindness Fitzwalter declined, saying his own servant, David, was accustomed to his friend Austin, and he alone was most proper to attend him, as questions or company increased his distraction.

Fitzwalter then taking the stranger by the arm, led him to the apartment allotted; nor did he leave him till he saw a blazing fire kindled, and proper food set before him, when giving him to the care of David, he rejoined his father and Edith.

To the questions of the baron to Fitzwalter respecting his journey, he replied, that long as his absence had been, he had passed no time in London; for having by chance heard of his friend's distressful state, he had devoted all his cares to his recovery, and for the whole of the last month had been confined in Norfolk, where the paroxysms of insanity had been far more violent than at the present time.

As the period appointed for the nuptials

tials approached, the baron was at the height of his wishes; Edith also exulted in her own heart; Fitzwalter alone was still sorrowful, and his cares, far from being devoted to his bride, were bestowed on the crazy stranger, who after a month's constant attention, became more manageable, though he held converse with no one but Fitzwalter and David.

The contract of marriage was then drawn, Fitzwalter declining all power on Mountford's fortune, as left in case of his marriage with Edith, settling it wholly on herself and her heirs, claiming only the release of his father's lands. In requital for this resignation, he required the privilege of educating in his own house, and under his immediate inspection, his daughter Margaret, and that no one should, either at the present or at any future period, have a right to discharge from her service the faithful Alice, either during his life, or in case of his death.

These

These arrangements being agreed upon and ratified, the marriage took place.

Margaret, at this period, was two years old, and if ever Fitzwalter knew a mitigation to the deep and gloomy melancholy that preyed upon him, it was when caressing his infant daughter. According to agreement, she was brought to the castle, and an apartment assigned to her and Alice; and though Fitzwalter's bride did not take upon her those maternal cares which could not have failed to render her estimable in the eyes of her husband, yet, at casual meetings, she behaved in a manner that could not give occasion of complaint.

In the mean time, Fitzwalter did not neglect the disordered stranger: many hours did he daily pass in his apartment, and spared no pains, tenderness, nor expence, to restore him to sanity.

His cares were at length crowned with success. Austin grew more calm, and his fits of frenzy gave way to a settled melancholy,

melancholy, strongly tinctured with that religious zeal which the mind is prone to give into, when it has been suddenly torn from all earthly objects, and thinks only of a future state.

The cares of Fitzwalter did not, however, relax: he gave him more liberty, and frequently walked or rode with him; but all his attempts were vain to persuade him to mix or hold converse with the family, little Margaret alone excepted, whom Alice, by order of Fitzwalter, would frequently bring into the apartment, as he observed the caresses of the innocent babe usually forced Austin to shed tears, and by that means eased his overcharged heart.

David, who constantly slept in the room with Austin, one morning, to his great and dreadful alarm, found he had risen in the night, and escaped by the window. He instantly hastened to Fitzwalter's apartment, and awakening him, he arose, and sending his domestics dif-

 ferent

ferent ways, joined also himself in the pursuit of the runaway. The search was, however, fruitless—all returned without the smallest trace that could direct them which way to seek him. In this dilemma, David recollected that he had seen his charge busily writing the day before, and searching his desk, soon found a letter directed to Fitzwalter. He immediately hastened with it to his master, who impatiently tearing it open, found as follows:

"The wretched lost maniac, Austin, hath not forgotten the promise that the friendship of Fitzwalter extorted from him; he will neither leave the kingdom, nor attempt aught against his own worthless life; and therefore prays that Fitzwalter will make no search after him, but leave him in peace to the life he has resolved upon. So may Heaven preserve his most generous, but cruel friend,

friend, and pardon the most heinous of all sinners, prays the contrite

"AUSTIN."

This letter bestowed a gleam of comfort on Fitzwalter; but he was soon destined to suffer in another point. The baron, who had long been declining, died, when his death could not relieve his son from a vow which appeared rather to have increased than lessened his melancholy, and which he had taken with no other view than to secure his aged parent from sorrow.

Rank was what Edith particularly aspired to, she was therefore now at the height of her wishes; and as she expected that, in the person of the lady Fitzwalter, every one would forget the daughter of the usurious Mountford, so did she apparently forget it herself.

CHAPTER VI.

Ten months after the baron Fitzwalter's marriage, his lady was delivered of a daughter; but the child was so sickly, that small hopes were entertained of its life, until the baron, who had a high opinion of Alice's skill, desired she might be consulted in its management. Nothing but the danger of the infant could have obliged the baroness to consent to this request; but her fears for its life made her prejudices give way, and Alice, who possessed too good a disposition, and too much rectitude, to be displeased with the babe for the contemptuous conduct of its mother, immediately undertook the task, requiring only that the child

and

and its nurse might have an apartment adjoining that of Margaret, as in that case she should be always at hand, to pay it the attention necessary for its well doing.

Margaret, now three years old, was the delight of her father; she played by his side, and in many of his walks was his constant companion. In these, young as she was, he would talk to her of her mother, teach her to repeat her name, and in his gayer moments (if any could be called such) he would sing to her little madrigals that her mother was accustomed to sing, and whose voice used to add melody to the simplicity of the words.

The affection of Alice for the little Margaret was, to express it as it truly deserved, not inferior to that of the lord Fitzwalter. She had, in her youth, been left a childless widow, and, by necessity forced to seek a maintenance, had been appointed to the care of Blanch, whose

youth and innocence by degrees weaning her from her sorrows, had imperceptibly supplied the vacuum left in her heart. That affection was now transferred to Margaret, whom she not only regarded as a sacred trust left her by her beloved Blanch, but also as an infant at whose baptism she had taken a sacrament to sustain and instruct in the best manner she was able. Alice was naturally so mild, unassuming, and pious, that all good people approved her, and even evil ones could not find room to accuse her. She had received what, at that period, was accounted a good education, and as soon as Margaret could speak, began teaching her to read and to pray, taking her daily to the chapel of the castle, where, at the foot of the altar, she taught her an *Ave Maria* for the repose of her mother's soul. Sometimes she would stray as far as the mountains that sheltered the coast, and peeping into the dreary cave of St. Margaret (for she did not

not dare explore it) they would proceed to the old chapel, where Alice would enter boldly; for in so sacred a dwelling she had no idea that evil could reach her. Here would she again teach the young Margaret to kneel before the broken altar, and lift her to see the ancient monuments that the ravages of time and sacrilege had spared. Two, particularly, in the middle of the choir, were the most perfect—the one of a warrior, by the surrounding ornaments; the second of a lady placed close by his side, and at her feet a dog, holding in his mouth a human hand.

One evening that Alice, with her young charge, extended her walk to the chapel, on passing through the gloomy cloisters that surrounded the building, the quick eyes of Margaret suddenly discovered some object among the pillars, that caused her to exclaim, in her infantile accent—"Look, dame, who is there?"

As she spoke, she pointed her finger, and instantly directed the sight of Alice to a corner, where she could plainly discover a human figure behind the columns that supported the roof. A sentiment of fear, for the first time in so holy a place, seized on the mind of Alice, and snatching up the child, she with trembling steps hastened forward, with evident marks of perturbation. This alarm was so apparent, that it did not escape the person who caused it; for a voice, in gentle accents, immediately hailed them, saying—"Fear nothing, sister; those who trust in God have no cause for fear: the blessed Virgin protect and guide you!—Depart in peace."

"The blessing return upon you, whosoever you be!" answered Alice, emboldened by this gentle salutation. "If you come into this sacred place to pray, as I deem you do, Heaven grant your request! Good-even!"

The concealed person only replied by a heavy

a heavy sigh, and Alice proceeded on her way.

When the baron called in Margaret's apartment, as was his usual custom before he went to supper, Alice informed him of the surprise they had met with. He listened with attention.—"My good dame," said he, when she concluded, "your adventure has given rise to a supposition that I shall not be at ease till I can satisfy, though to-night it is impossible."

Without entering into further explanation, he kissed the sleeping Margaret, and also the young Isabel; for though Fitzwalter was, undoubtedly, not attached to the baroness as he had formerly been to Blanch, yet he was too good a man not to be a tender and affectionate father to all his offspring.

CHAPTER VII.

FITZWALTER rose at the break of day, and hastened to the chapel. He was wrapped in his long cloak, and under his arm he used the precaution to carry his broadsword—not that he apprehended danger, but that he wished to be provided against it. Thus accoutred, and unattended, he entered and explored it in every part: but all was silent and deserted, as the inhabitants of the graves around him. Wearied with a fruitless search, he left the chapel, and pursued his way to St. Margaret's Cave, which he examined as accurately as he had before done the chapel, and not entirely with as little success—for in one corner of

of the cave he found some shell-fish, which had been freshly taken from the shore; in another, a bed constructed of rushes, the head of which was only raised from the rest by a stone; in a third aperture were some wood embers, yet warm; and in a fourth a wooden crucifix, rudely carved, a skull, an hour-glass, and two devotional books.

These different objects strengthened the suspicion lord Fitzwalter had formed, and, resolved to be satisfied, he seated himself upon a projection of the rock, where he remained in painful expectation, wearied with watching, yet fully resolved to persevere. A rustling among the bushes at length gave him hopes that the object he expected approached. He was not deceived—the resident of the cave entered, and somewhat disappointed Fitzwalter by presenting to his sight a Franciscan friar, clothed in all the severity of his order. The figure of Fitzwalter, who sat more advanced in

the cave, was not so discernible to the friar, though he could clearly discover an intruder.—"Whosoever ye be," said he, still advancing, "that thus unexpectedly I meet in this dwelling, ye come not, I truly deem, for riches; if to seek an asylum from poverty, ye are welcome to such food as this cave affords, and when refreshed, depart in peace. Or if ye seek a recess where the repentant soul may weep and pray for the foul crimes of youth, haste to take upon ye the habit I have chosen; then will I give ye tear for tear, sigh for sigh, and prayer for prayer."

"None of these causes brought me hither," exclaimed Fitzwalter, throwing himself forward, and snatching hold of the friar's garment; "I came to meet a dear and beloved friend, and praise be to Heaven I have found him!"

"Fitzwalter!" said the friar: "dearest, best of men! why will your unwearied kindness seek a monster, whose life, but

for

for you, had been justly forfeited to the violated laws of God, nature, and his country?—Leave me, leave me, I conjure you!—it befits not the habit I have chosen, nor the life of mortification I have adopted, to hold converse with one whom, in spite of all my crimes, I still see with pleasure."

"Austin," answered Fitzwalter, holding his garment, "accompany me, I conjure you, to the castle. I grieve to use violence, but I will not leave you. Time, I trust, will heal those paroxysms of anguish that at intervals disturb your reason. Need I say my house—my fortune—my life, are at your command?"

The friar fell on Fitzwalter's neck, and wept aloud.—"Oh, my friend!" at length said he, "madness no longer bewilders my bursting brain; but anguish, remorse, and repentance, swell my heart even to agony. No! I will convince you my reason is perfect, and then you will not prevent my adopting the only life

life that can, in any manner, make expiation for my crimes. The solemn oath you required of me, before you gave me any liberty, I remember, and am resolved to keep. My soul is already too much charged with guilt, to add suicide to the number of my crimes. No—this pampered lascivious body shall suffer, and if it be possible, even in this world expiate some of its numberless transgressions. Walking with you, I first saw this cave and the adjoining chapel, and my resolution was immediately fixed. Me thought an internal monitor whispered to my lacerated conscience, 'Here, Austin, is a dwelling befitting deeds like thine!—here the sinful soul may cleanse itself by fasting, suffering, penitence, and prayer, from the foul crimes that must otherwise plunge it in everlasting perdition!"

"I perfectly recollect," answered Fitzwalter, "that we held some conversation on religious retirement, as we sat one afternoon,

ternoon, during the heat, in the cave; but I was far from suspecting you could conceive such a plan, and never thought more of it, until Alice informing me she met with some person in the cloisters, which by the country people are, I know, shunned, the supposition at once struck me, and I resolved to be satisfied."

"The inspiration, Fitzwalter, was not to be resisted," said he, "nor did I attempt it; I resolved to escape from your kind care, and having effected my purpose, hastened to the monastery of Franciscans at Berwick. To the good fathers I related all my sins, and all my sufferings, finally informing them of the resolution I had formed, and requesting to be admitted into their order. The friars listened to me with pity and kindness, and urged me to persevere in my intention: but before they would admit me into my noviciate, requested me to consult a learned and holy man, called Stephen

Stephen Baron*, provincial of his order in England, and at that time passing some short space with the Grey Friars at Scarborough. To this holy father I then hastened, who, after having consulted with his brethren, and questioned me on various religious subjects, which, shame to say, I was ignorant of, allowed me to enter on my noviciate, with this especial licence, that as the inspiration first took place in St. Margaret's Cave, I should be permitted to make it my dwelling, contrary to the custom of Franciscans, who, I need not tell you, usually lead a more wandering life, spreading the light of truth in divers places. These points arranged, they gave me the habiliments I wear, permitting me, if I found occasion, to use sandals of my own making. They

* Stephen Baron was appointed confessor to Henry the Eighth. He was the author of several Sermons, and likewise a Treatise on the Government of Princes. He died, much in years, in 1520.

They then urged me to persevere, blessed, and dismissed me."

Notwithstanding Austin's manner was collected, and his memory retained, even to a minute degree, what had passed, yet Fitzwalter could plainly perceive that his mind had not yet gained its customary strength. His eyes still sparkled with more than even their usual vivacity, and though his visage was pallid, and his form wasted, yet no weakness appeared to attend the change, but rather that force and animation that frequently accompanies insanity.

Fitzwalter in vain had recourse to entreaties and remonstrance—both were unavailing: Austin was not to be moved from his purpose, and to force a man, admitted as a novice by the brotherhood of Franciscans, was an exertion of power that even the rank of the baron Fitzwalter could not answer. The fathers, he readily conjectured, would not easily allow themselves so grossly mistaken as to

to have admitted a man disordered in his mind into their order; and should he force him to the castle, he should draw upon himself the vengeance of the whole body: relinquishing, therefore, his first resolve, he conjured Austin not to give into all the severities of the order he had chosen, requested a promise from him that he would see him daily, and take no step for a removal without giving him previous information. Austin refused to agree with the first request, but readily promised the two latter; and the day being advanced, they soon after separated.

CHAP-

CHAPTER VIII.

THOUGH Fitzwalter had the utmost reverence for religion and its ministers, yet he could not forbear, as he returned home, forming some severe reflections on the friars, whose zeal for proselytes had carried them so far as to make them overlook the disordered mind of Austin.

In these reflections he however judged erroneously; for though the malady under which Austin laboured was evident to the scrutinizing eye of friendship, yet there was nothing in his conduct that could be particularly noticed by any person less interested, except that it might have caused wonder to see a man in the prime

prime of life, gifted with all the graces of person, and dignified by a strong and enlightened mind, thus willingly embrace the most severe and mortifying of all the holy orders.

On Fitzwalter's reaching the castle, he had a long conversation with Alice, who, though she held the baron's opinion in the utmost reverence, was not afraid, in this case, to dissent from him. She highly applauded Austin's resolution, and concluded by saying, that when the mind was so deeply wounded as his must necessarily be, she could see no source of consolation so likely to be efficacious as religion and retirement.

"True, Alice," answered Fitzwalter; "and equally so without haircloth or a cowl. Heaven knows," continued he, walking hastily up and down the apartment, "my bosom, though covered with sumptuous apparel, suffers frequently, even to agony; and my face, though at the

the festive board it wears the semblance of pleasure, yet it often conceals an aching heart."

"True, my gracious lord," answered Alice; "but sins and sorrows require different expiations, and must be judged according to the sources from whence they arise. Early in life, you, my noble master, lost the beloved of your heart, the fairest and best of women." As Alice spoke, the ready tears flowed from her eyes, and dropped upon Margaret's hand. "But you lost her by no unworthy means, but by the will of that Power who gave, and had a right, at his own pleasure, to call her back to himself. After her death, though sinking under the weight of your afflictions, you forgot neither the duty of a son, nor the affection of a parent. Such sorrows as yours, my lord, therefore, can need no expiation; but for the errors of your noble friend, you must pardon me if

if I think the severest penance necessary to expiate them."

"In the situation he has chosen, there is no way to afford him even common comfort," said Fitzwalter—"I do not mean luxuries, Alice; but for a man habituated to the softest indulgence, to stretch his limbs on the damp earth, or at best on sorry rushes, is a sad exchange; and from being accustomed to the dainties of a well-covered table, to feed on the mountain-berries, a few shell-fish, or what the casual bounty of strangers may bestow, is a life which I am convinced Austin can never long sustain."

"My lord," said Alice, "the saints that inspired the thought can enable him to support it. Conscious of making, even in this world, every expiation in his power, peace and rectitude will act as powerful opiates, even on a bed of rushes; and for a table, why should we pamper our bodies for the worms that will

will devour us?—so nature is satisfied, what have we more to crave? No, my good master, the noble Austin has chosen a better part, and means to enrich that which never perishes; so that when the great Giver of all good shall call him to his dread account, he may render his soul purified, even in this mortal life, by penitence, fasting, and prayer."

"Alice," replied Fitzwalter, "thou reasonest like a Christian—I speak as a friend. Thy pious counsels taught my sainted Blanch that patience, fortitude, and sweetness, that raised her, even on earth, above mortality; teach my darling Margaret, my good dame, the same lesson, and thou wilt bestow on her a better portion than any Fitzwalter has in his power to give."

"The qualities you speak of," answered Alice, "are the immediate gift of Providence, and the utmost my weak efforts can effect is to cherish, and endeavour to bring

bring to perfection, those inestimable blessings."

The nurse of the young Isabel at that moment entering with her charge, the conversation ceased, and Fitzwalter left the apartment.

CHAP.

CHAPTER IX.

FROM the time of Fitzwalter's discovering Austin in St. Margaret's Cave, he never failed to visit it daily, and in spite of remonstrance, to pass some hours there—an exertion of friendship that the novice sincerely felt, though he constantly refused all indulgence, of what kind soever. In a sheltered spot between the mountains he had planted some vegetables and roots, which, with the shell-fish he picked up on the shore, constituted his whole food. His drink was procured from a spring that issued from the side of the hills, and which served not only to quench his thirst, but to fertilize his little plantation. His dress was that

usually worn by the Franciscans*, with sandals of his own making on his feet, and his head uncovered, and exposed to all the inclemencies of the weather. Accustomed from his infancy to an active life, idleness by no means suited the temper of Austin; and as devotion now mingled in all his pursuits, he formed the project of cleaning, and, as far as in his power lay, repairing, the part of the old chapel nearest the altar. For this purpose, with indefatigable perseverance, he fetched shells from the sea-shore, which, burning, he formed into lime, and by that means, and with infinite labour, replaced many of the stones in their original destination.

In these employments, broken in upon only by the duties of the life he had adopted, and the visits of Fitzwalter, passed the year of Austin's noviciate, which

* A tunic, breeches, cloak, and girdle, composed of hair-cloth; after they are professed, a hood or cowl is added.

which expired, he again visited the fathers at Scarborough, and was admitted, with the usual ceremonies, into their community. Permission was still continued for him to reside in the dwelling he had chosen, with this only clause, that he should no longer so entirely seclude himself, but by active exertions of piety endeavour to render himself serviceable, by visiting the sick, comforting the afflicted, reproving the wicked, and standing forth in the cause of truth and innocence. They also ordered him to refrain from so severe an abstinence, except on the fasts appointed, as it was evident, from his meagre and care-worn person, it might be productive of the worst consequences, by not only impairing his health, but wilfully shortening his life—a sin of such magnitude, that no penitence could obliterate. This last order, though unsuspected by Austin, was the device of Fitzwalter, who had paid the fathers a visit, in which he so clearly

pointed out the dangerous severity in which his friend lived, that they promised to exert their authority to make him, in some measure, change it.

These commands were not entirely conformable to the plan Austin had wished to adopt; he did not, however, think himself authorized to retract from the rules of the order, and therefore resolved to endeavour to fulfil its decrees, though still with severe abstinence.

On Austin's taking up his residence at St. Margaret's Cave, his appearance caused the utmost alarm to some of the peasantry, who by chance had seen him; but the frequent visits of lord Fitzwalter, and his affection to the friar, were speedily so well known, that all fear gave way to reverence for the holy man, who had thus, though they knew not from what cause, devoted himself, even in the prime of life, to such severe and voluntary retirement.

The respect that had at first arisen for

Austin

Austin from the attention of lord Fitzwalter was soon paid to him for his own merits. Lenient to the poor and suffering, mild in his reproof to the wayward sinner, firm in the duties of his profession, and cruel only to himself, he was universally beloved. Undismayed would he enter the houses where contagious sickness reigned, and unwearied tender his prayers for the sufferers, while all fled, but those whom the most tender ties of nature or affection bound. Not content with offering prayers alone in the hour of danger, he had once exerted himself by leaping into a rapid stream, and snatching an infant from certain death; and during a fire that destroyed one of the cottages of the hamlet, at the imminent hazard of his own life he had rushed through the blazing timbers, and with a strength his worn form did not promise, brought out an aged man, whose palsied limbs must otherwise have doomed him to certain destruction. Such deeds as

these made the father almost idolized; and had it not been for his express commands, and the visible humiliation it occasioned him, the peasantry would, on his appearance, have followed him with blessings and prayers, even to his own habitation. Of their choicest fruits they never failed to bring him a part, as also eggs, milk, or whatever they considered most pleasant to him (for flesh he strictly refused); but these were always accepted with so sparing a hand, that the good people frequently retired distressed and dissatisfied, and many, from offering their gifts, took a different method, which was, at break of day to hasten, in a company of four or five, for they were not yet even bold enough to venture alone, and place their presents at the entrance of his cell.

These private gifts Austin attributed to the lord Fitzwalter, and in truth he was frequently not mistaken, though, to do justice to the country people, they never

never forgot to supply the father two or three times a-week.

Among the friar's visitants, few were more constant than Fitzwalter's old servant, David, who would frequently steal opportunities, whilst Austin was absent, to lay fresh rushes for him to sleep upon, and in the winter months kindle a fire, sufficient not only to diffuse warmth and comparative cheerfulness over the dreary cave, but also to purify it from the noxious vapours of the damp air. When the weather would permit, Alice was equally attentive, though, as she frequently observed, her visits were merely to profit by the lessons of the friar, and to join with him in pious supplications in the old chapel. Little Margaret was always a party in these visits, and was scarcely more attached to the baron than to the good father.

The infant Isabel, by the care and skill of Alice, had now entirely overcome the weakness of her first months;

she walked, chatted, and in the youthful graces of her person was scarcely excelled by Margaret. It was Alice's first wish to unite the sisters by the bonds of affection, and that wish, as far as can be judged from their early propensities, was gratified, much to the satisfaction of the baron, though by no means to that of the baroness, who frequently declared to her favourite dependents, that the baron's conduct was shameful, in placing his legitimate child as companion to his base-born daughter. She had likewise, more than once, attempted to remove Isabel from the care of Alice; but this Fitzwalter constantly objected to with unshaken firmness, saying, that unless the baroness could allege some just cause of complaint, he could never countenance such gross injustice, or give his child a lesson of such early ingratitude, as to take her from the person to whose care she in all probability owed her life.

The fondness of the children for each other

other was also a cause of discontent to the lady Fitzwalter, and while their little arms clasped each other's neck, and their lips met in affectionate kisses, her heart would overflow with bitterness, and she would turn aside to avoid the sight, while, on the contrary, Fitzwalter encircling both in his arms, would bless them, and with raised eyes pray that Heaven might cement their affection with their years—a supplication to which the pious Alice never failed to say amen.

CHAPTER X.

MARGARET had nearly attained her ninth year, and Isabel completed her sixth, when the baron's health, which had long been declining, became apparently worse, though not sufficiently so to alarm his family. He had, at this period, long and frequent conferences with the friar, who even sometimes left his cell, and was shut up with him for hours alone in his apartment. One evening Fitzwalter, pleading business, excused himself from supping in the hall with some guests the baroness had invited, and retired to his closet, where he passed the hours till near ten in writing, when summoning David, he said, as he lighted him to his chamber—

chamber—"Fail not, at early dawn, to hasten to friar Austin, and entreat him to come to me as speedily as convenient. I am sick at heart, David, and a secret monitor seems to whisper, that ere long my wearied spirit shall rest in peace."

"My dear master," answered David, "Heaven of its mercy grant that even in this life you may regain that peace you stand so much in need of, and so well deserve! Thirty-one years, my lord, have only passed over your head, and more than sixty over that of your poor servant; and much do I pray that you may survive me as many years as I passed before you came into the world."

"The will of God be done!" answered Fitzwalter: "my Blanch, David, was scarcely nineteen.—Sweet flower!" added he, after a pause, "I have mourned thee for nine long years; but the time will come, as thou truly saidst, when we shall meet again." As Fitzwalter spoke, he raised his eyes, and saw the old man's

cheeks were bathed in tears.—"My faithful servant," said Fitzwalter, shaking him by the hand, "or rather my long-tried friend, to-morrow I must again call thee back to scenes long past; my mind will then be more at ease, and my health perhaps benefit by the change."

"The holy Virgin grant it!" answered David. "Before the lark has left her nest, my lord, will I hasten to your noble friend; or if you have the most distant wish to see him this night, I will away to St. Margaret's—the moon shines bright—I shall be back speedily."

"No, my good David; the business, though I earnestly wish it concluded, is not, I trust, so immediately pressing. Sleep has lately been almost a stranger to me: to-night I feel uncommonly heavy, and will retire to rest. The baroness, I judge, is in the hall with the guests: disturb her not, I entreat you; but when the company retire, tell her I felt too much disordered to join them."

As

As Fitzwalter spoke, David assisted him to undress, and scarcely was his head placed upon the pillow, before the heaviness he complained of overpowered him. David, from the words of his lord, his declining health, and uncommon sleepiness, felt alarmed, and though he did not dare disobey him by disturbing the baroness, resolved to watch in his apartment.

Fitzwalter's sleep, though heavy, was restless. He breathed at times hard, and at intervals distinctly articulated the names of Blanch, De Hoffman, Margaret, and Austin.

David drew near the bed, and cautiously advanced the lamp; but his lord's features being composed, he became more satisfied, and gently replacing the light, resumed his seat.

The castle bell at that moment announced the hour of midnight, and the distant noise of the company separating appeared to disturb the sleep of Fitzwal-

ter,

ter, who started and groaned aloud. David again hastened to his side; but far from the ease he before experienced, he was struck with horror and dismay, to find his noble master struggling in a paroxysm of one of those dreadful fits, in which life and death are so equally poised that the weight of a hair would turn the balance. At this sight, not only the chamber, but the surrounding apartments, resounded with his cries, which soon reached the domestics, who hastened in a body to learn the cause. General alarm for the event took place, but certainty too soon succeeded; for after a few struggles, the whole of which did not last half an hour, Fitzwalter yielded up his soul to its great Creator.

The baroness, who had been apprised of the danger, and who was present at his death, gave way to the most violent sorrow, and at length, supported by her women, was conducted to her chamber. Alice, though she slept in a distant apartment,

apartment, was alarmed by the general confusion, and hastened to be informed of the cause, which she heard with the most piercing grief; and finding all human cares unavailing (for the baron had little remains of life when she entered), she with unaffected piety knelt by his side, and bathing his hand, which she held in hers, with the tears of pure and disinterested affection, offered up her prayers for his eternal repose.

The awful struggle ended, and the baroness withdrawn, Alice still remained kneeling, as by her example did also the servants, till the break of day, when she said—" David, I pray you lose no time, but send to father Austin. I dread the effect this melancholy event will have upon him, but it is necessary he be informed of it without delay."

David, thus recalled to recollection, in a voice often interrupted by his emotion, related the orders of his master the foregoing night, and then, by the advice of Alice,

Alice, departed upon the melancholy errand, hoping to be able to divulge the tidings more gently than those who felt them less severely.

On David's reaching the cave, he found the friar already risen, and judging he should find him at prayers in the chapel, he repaired thither. Austin was kneeling before the altar; but the unexpected appearance of David, and the sorrow depicted on his features, made him arise hastily, and advancing towards the old man, he said, in a voice of alarm—"My honest friend, what brings you at this early hour? How doth Fitzwalter? Your looks alarm me."

David's only reply was tears.

"Merciful Heaven! Speak—let me know the worst! I deserve punishment, and pray constantly for fortitude to support it; say, then, what sorrow shakes thus your aged frame, and in which I already feel I am to participate?"

David struggled to speak, but his voice

voice was stifled by the violence of his emotion, and he could only, in broken accents, give the friar to understand the extent of his loss.

Austin for a moment appeared thunderstruck; then throwing himself on the flinty pavement, he exclaimed—"Wretched sinner that I am! I have now lost the only friend my crimes had left me. Oh, my generous, my noble Fitzwalter! would I had died for thee, my more than brother!"

"My good master," answered David, endeavouring to restrain his own grief, fearful of increasing that of the friar, "if I mistake not, there are duties relative to my lord that you alone can fulfil: nearly his last commands
to seek you at the friar, accompanied by presence. ok the road to the castle.

Daviged in the deepest melancholy, friarher spoke by the way, David reheving the fulness of his heart by tears,
t and

[illegible] overcome our selfish feelings [illegible] severe loss. But," added he, [illegible] a degree of wildness David had not [illegible] since his residence in [illegible] did the murderous ti- [illegible] the lamb? or when did the [illegible] preserve the dove?—No! no!— [illegible] I am proof against the [illegible] innocence, and that my dagger [illegible] to destroy it."

"My [illegible] master," answered Da- [illegible] I conjure you, this emo- [illegible] to resume your ac- [illegible] Heaven sooth your [illegible] convinced that you would [illegible] even the worm that [illegible] path: and for daggers, you [illegible] only weapons you use [illegible] I deserve persuasion."

"Merciful Heaven! know the worst! and pray constantly for fortitude to his fore- port it; say, then, what sorrow shaseveral thus your aged frame, and in which lm- already feel I am to participate?" d

David struggled to speak, but his voice

distraction that disgraces the holy habit I have chosen. Hasten back to the castle—in a short time I will follow."

"From my lord's earnestness last night," returned David, "I am assured much depends on you. The holy Virgin forgive me! but I like not the baroness; for often have I remarked her malignant looks when my lord caressed his little Margaret."

"Your conjectures are, I fear, not ill-founded," replied Austin, after a pause. "Fitzwalter's will, I doubt, is not finished, though I know it is nearly so; I will therefore banish this unavailing grief, and without delay take what steps are in my power for the interest of the orphan."

So saying, the friar, accompanied by David, took the road to the castle.

Plunged in the deepest melancholy, neither spoke by the way, David relieving the fulness of his heart by tears, and

and the father breathing forth sighs that apparently shook his frame even to agony.

CHAP-

CHAPTER XI.

On reaching the castle, Austin and David went immediately to the chamber of Fitzwalter, where they found only Alice and two female servants sitting mournfully by the body. On the friar's entrance, the attendants withdrew, judging the father came to offer up those prayers which religion demands in cases of sudden and unexpected death.

No salutation passed between the friar and Alice; for the former with anguish falling on the body of his friend, clasped him in his arms, exclaiming—" Oh, Fitzwalter! I trust I commit no sin, in thus bathing thy virtuous clay with the tears of one so polluted with crimes as myself.

myself. Oh thou, who perforce obliged me to suffer life, would to heaven I could impart to thee the like gift!—thou so beloved and estimable, and whose life is so much more requisite than that of the wretched Austin!"

"The noble Fitzwalter," said Alice, firmly, "favoured by God, has soon hastened to reap the reward of his virtues: pardon me, therefore, good father, but surely we should not mourn him as one without hope? In this distress, from you we look for advice, consolation, and future guidance: disappoint us not; by your example teach us that resignation that true devotion can alone inspire; and over the innocent and defenceless Margaret stretch your protecting arm, and supply the place of a parent."

"Virtuous Alice," answered Austin, "I stand reproved. Here, before you and the worthy David, I swear, by all my hopes of pardon! that every duty in the power of man, and consistent with the

the life I have adopted, I will exert for our beloved orphan. May the spirit of my Fitzwalter be permitted to witness this oath, and may Heaven ratify it!"

"And I," said David, kneeling with equal solemnity, "swear, by all my hopes of happiness, to be equally faithful to her interest, as I have heretofore been to that of my honoured master!—and call Heaven equally to witness this oath."

"The like vow rest upon me!" said Alice. "With the tenderness of a mother, and the solicitude of a friend, will I watch over her youth; but, alas! what, should occasion call, can my weakness effect against the strong hand of power, which, like a torrent, sweeps away all before it?"

"Dame Alice," answered the father, "the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. Power belongs to God alone, and as he wills, so all shall be: his rain watereth the young plants, and his sun bringeth them to perfection;

so

so also shall his might bring to maturity our unsheltered flower. The storms of adverse fortune, that beat over the head of youth, destroy not the buds of virtue, but rather strengthen, and accustom them to bear with fortitude the turmoils they meet as they advance in life. The pampered lord, who never heard the voice of reproof, or felt the keen blast of the wintry wind, is usually a slave to himself, and a tyrant to his vassals; while, on the contrary, he that by adversity has been taught that he is no more than his fellows, treats his dependents with gentleness, and becomes a blessing to all. —So may it be with our Margaret, good Alice! and Heaven make us the humble guides, to lead her in the path her noble father would have approved, and what the father of us all will sanction!"

"Amen!" answered Alice; "methinks my heart beats lighter. I will away to my dear child, whom I left in my first alarm sleeping with the young Isabel; and

and in the care of her nurse. Farewell, good father! I conjure you, sustain your spirits: remember, to you we look, as to our friend, our teacher, and protector."

With these words, Alice left the apartment, and a short silence ensued, when David's eyes filling anew with tears, he said—"Alas! I must needs hasten to perform the last duties required of me to this honoured body.—My gracious master," continued he, affectionately kissing the baron's lifeless hand, "thy noble heart, I well know, would have heaved a sigh for thy faithful David. Ah! much I wish that thou hadst sighed for me, rather than I have wept for thee; for it is unbeseemly for youth to press thus before age to the grave."

Austin turned away his head, and ventured no further speech than a general benediction, with which he left the apartment.

The friar passed through the gallery, and descended into the hall, where he

 found

found some domestics, one of whom he prayed to give a message to the baroness's women, requesting them to deliver it to her, and which was to this purport.—"Friar Austin, in all humility, salutes the lady Fitzwalter, and prays, as speedily as may be convenient to her, to be admitted into her presence, to converse with her on some business relative to the melancholy event which has taken place."

The father waited near an hour before he received the baroness's answer, and which was simply declining his visit that day, but appointing him to attend her at twelve the ensuing morning.

Alice, in the mean time, had hastened to Margaret, whom she found playing with Isabel, unconscious of the misfortune that had befallen them. The sisters ran to meet her, and clinging round her, asked where she had been, and why she had left them so long? Alice pressed both in her maternal arms, but unequal

to

to holding any conversation, took a seat in silence. Margaret viewed the good woman for some time with attention. "Dame," at length said she, "your eyes are red; if you are ill, Isabel and I will nurse you."

"Yes," added the prattling Isabel, "I will not make a noise at all, if good dame is sick."

Alice took one on each knee, and in the most gentle accents, suited to their youthful capacity, informed them that it had pleased God to remove their father from the troubles of the world to endless felicity. The children listened with attention; but Isabel was too young to feel the loss so acutely as did Margaret, who wept so bitterly, that neither the soothing of Alice nor the caresses of her sister had for many hours the least effect.

Father Austin, as appointed on the ensuing morning, waited on the baroness,

to whom he was immediately admitted. The foregoing day, and the whole of the night, he had passed in prayer, and by that means had regained a composure that befitted his holy habit. On his entering the lady Fitzwalter's chamber, she dismissed her woman, and having received the condolence of the father, required to know the business he alluded to the day before.

"The business, lady," answered Austin, "was to inform you, that there are some requests in my lord your husband's will, that it may be necessary to apprise you of before his funeral."

"If the baron had a will, I am unacquainted with it," answered she: "are you possessed of a copy, father?"

"No, it was not entirely completed the day previous to his death, but enough to satisfy all honest minds. You will find it in the cabinet in the baron's closet, with his other papers."

"I have

"I have the keys, father—they were brought me yesterday; take them, and bring it hither."

Austin, calling some of the principal attendants, entered the late baron's closet, and unlocked the cabinet, which contained a number of different writings; but the will was not to be found among them. Austin, fearfully alarmed, sought every place, but in vain, and was necessitated to return to the lady without it.

"By my life," said he, "there is villany in this business! I not only saw, but read it, two days since: a small addition was alone wanting to complete it."

"I am entirely ignorant on the subject," said the baroness. "My lord was many hours alone the night previous to his death; the will might not entirely meet his approbation, and he might destroy it."

"Impossible!" replied the friar: "the confession of the lady Blanch was affixed

to it with his own seal; think ye he would destroy that?"

As Austin spoke, he fixed his eyes upon her, and a blush, which she could not suppress, almost convinced him she was guilty.

"The confession of Blanch Stanley," replied she, "could only publish shame—better for the honour of both forgotten."

"Perhaps not, lady."

"It could not be otherwise. The baron too well knew my father's will to marry her, as in that case the mortgage would remain in full force."

"Grant it was so," replied the friar, "enough would still remain for the eldest daughter of Fitzwalter."

"Eldest daughter of Fitzwalter!" repeated the baroness, passionately. "I acknowledge no lawful daughter to Fitzwalter but Isabel: had there been any other, think you not the baron would have appointed her proper guardians? As it is, I regard Margaret as my especial

cial charge, and shall undoubtedly do all for her that my respect for the memory of the baron demands."

The friar paused: he clearly conceived that, by the loss of Fitzwalter's will, the first right to Margaret remained with the baroness, and fearful of exasperating a serpent that might sting her to death, he replied mildly—"God alone, lady, is a judge of the human heart, and in his own time develops or conceals its secret movements, as it tends to manifest his glory, or the good of his creatures: this event, therefore, for the present, must rest. The parent of orphans knows best what is proper for his children, and to him we will leave her."

The mildness of the friar calmed the warmth of the baroness—"Father," said she, "every care that Margaret enjoyed during the life of the baron shall be continued; but when you speak of placing her in the seat of his lawful daughter,

you must excuse the anger it forces from me."

The friar made no reply, but changing the conversation, asked if she was informed that the baron wished his remains to be taken to Germany, and deposited in the convent of St. Mary, near Bremen?

The lady answered in the negative; but said, that as there was no will to enforce that request, she should, for the baron's own honour, prevent it being put in effect, as it must be highly derogatory for him to be carried from the burial-place of his ancestors, to be laid by a woman whom she much wondered the nuns had admitted into their holy ground.

The friar felt a sentiment of anger that he could scarcely repress, but struggling to overcome it, he retired, with an appearance of calmness that he was far from feeling.

CHAP-

CHAPTER XII.

TWELVE days after the baron's death, his body was deposited in the chapel of the castle, as his lady had expressed to the friar. She then took unlimited command over the whole domain, and made several new arrangements respecting the vassals, which caused them to feel keenly the loss of their good lord. Alice she had never approved, but, bound by her marriage articles not to remove her from Margaret, she could only shew her dislike by treating her and her young charge with disrespect. The care of Isabel she gave to one of her own women, and assigned her apartments in a distant part of the castle, strictly ordering that

no communication should be held between the children.

This command was no sooner given than obeyed. The tenderness of Alice for Isabel, and the affection she had assiduously cultivated between the sisters, young as they were, had taken too deep a root to be easily removed. Margaret's fondness for Alice, and the gentle soothings of the good dame, in some measure compensated to her for the loss of her sister; but not so Isabel. Unaccustomed to look up to her mother with the tenderness she felt for Alice, and disliking the person in whose care she was placed, she either sat sullenly silent, or giving vent to her little passions, screamed and called aloud on Alice and Margaret, with a perseverance that few children are capable of, but which lady Fitzwalter declared to be the unbending and obstinate spirit she inherited from her father.

Austin, who seldom visited at the castle during the baron's life, now rarely omitted

omitted a single day, unless Alice, with Margaret or David, called at his cell.

The baroness's dislike to the friar was even yet stronger than that she felt for Alice. She well knew that he was thoroughly acquainted with all the late baron's affairs, was tenderly attached to his memory, and warmly interested in all that concerned either Margaret or Isabel, both of whom he would fondle with even paternal kindness.

There was also a dignity in his behaviour, which, together with the mysterious manner in which he had first been introduced at the castle, inspired her at once with a mixture of respect and wonder. Frequently had she questioned the late baron concerning his friend; but his answers were ever so careless or evasive, that they rather increased her curiosity than satisfied it. Willingly would she have closed the castle gates against him, but that from powerful reasons she felt it impossible. The bosom-friend of her

lord, and almost idolized by the surrounding country for his virtue and humility, what excuse could she make for such a conduct? Thus situated, she was perforce obliged to submit; and as he ever behaved to herself with respectful deference, she the more readily yielded to it. Resolved, however, if possible, to unravel the mystery that hung about him, she one morning commanded David to be sent into her apartment, when she addressed him thus: "The cottage and land, David, which you held from my lord Fitzwalter, as I have some reason to suppose he meant it as a gift for your long services, though he did not express it, I am willing to ratify to you."

David sighed and bowed, but did not speak.

"Nay more," continued she, "I will myself be your friend; but I must be treated with sincerity and openness. I will have no secret plotters, who, under the guise of piety and mildness, steal into

into my family concerns, to forward views derogatory to the fortune and honour of the family of Fitzwalter."

"If such plotters there be, lady," replied David, with modest but manly firmness, "may their arts be exposed to all men, may the evil recoil on their own heads, and shame finally overtake them. For me, I am old; but in such a cause methinks I should possess all the energy of youth; and had I an hundred tongues and as many hands, they should all be employed in vindicating the rights and worth of my honoured lord."

"You speak warmly," answered lady Fitzwalter, with a sentiment of anger that she could not entirely suppress; "respect, as well as zeal, is necessary in my presence."

"I crave your pardon, lady—my error was unintentional; but even the frosts of sixty winters have not been sufficient to deaden the spirit of gratitude I must ever

ever feel for the respected name of Fitzwalter. Two hundred years, lady, have my poor family been vassals to my noble lord's, and if I had a drop of blood inimical to his honour, and knew what part of my body it disgraced, by my soul I would let it out."

"Enough," replied she, "of this attachment; let it suffice that I have both the will and power to serve you. You, I am well aware, are acquainted with the former situation of Austin; say then, what was he? and what induced him to take so extraordinary a step as becoming a friar?"

"His misfortunes, lady, as I should conjecture," answered David, "which had sickened him with the bustle of life. As to his former situation, I believe it was highly respectable, and his family distinguished——"

"You *believe!*" answered lady Fitzwalter: "and is this all the information you

you choose to bestow?—if so, take the consequence of my displeasure, which you merit, and shall not fail to meet."

"I should be grieved to meet your anger, and yet more so to have deserved it, lady," answered the old man. "If I in reality knew ought of the good friar, and *that* was entrusted to me under the veil of secrecy, and was of such a nature that it injured no man, what should you think of me were I to disclose it?"

"You would merely perform a duty you owe your superiors," replied she. "The respect you owed to your lord is now devolved to me; therefore give the proof I require, by answering those questions I have asked."

"The duty I owed my gracious lord is indeed transferred," replied David, "but for the love and respect I bore him, these shall accompany me to my grave. One of his commands was, '*forget all respecting Austin that he himself does not choose to disclose;*' and should I falsify

falsify that order, should I not be unworthy the trust reposed in me?"

"Prevaricating knave!" said she, "this obstinacy shall not pass unremembered. Leave me; but beware how you give your tongue licence to my disadvantage." David waited no second permission, but bowing, left the apartment.

The imperious conduct of the baroness to her vassals made her universally disliked; and though her rank procured her the outward marks of respect, yet that glow of satisfaction and pleasure that formerly used to enliven the features of the peasantry at the approach of their lord was now never to be discovered. On Margaret they looked with an anxious and curious eye. During the baron's life all had been silent respecting her, yet he had treated her as one whom he had no reason to blush to produce to the world; and though now, by the lady Fitzwalter's command, she was considered as the baron's natural daughter,

daughter, yet the same respect and attentive kindness attended her whenever she went abroad. The baroness was observant to all that passed; but, too artful to discover the impression it made upon her, she continued her usual conduct, and if her behaviour could not merit praise, at least it escaped severe reprehension.

The baron had been dead about a year, when, one morning that Austin paid his usual visit, he heard the baroness's voice loud in the hall, and entering, found her accompanied by Alice, Margaret, and Isabel, all of whom she was reprimanding with the greatest bitterness for disobedience of her orders, the children having been found that morning, in direct opposition to her commands, fondly embracing each other, in one of the galleries of the castle. Alice was accused of promoting such meetings, which one of lady Fitzwalter's women averred to be frequent, for that Isabel seized every

opportunity

opportunity to steal from her attendants, and was certain to be found in Margaret's apartment. Alice denied the charge, but candidly confessed that when meetings had taken place, she undoubtedly had not endeavoured to restrain the mutual affection of the children, as she should have considered such an act as sinful, and acting in direct opposition to the will of that Power who had commanded universal love, especially among those so near of kin. The baroness replied with acrimony; and regardless of what was due to her rank, descended so low as to use several bitter invectives, more disgraceful to herself than the object against whom they were intended. The respectable Alice was severely reprimanded, Isabel was repeatedly struck, and Margaret threatened and called *bastard*. At that moment the friar entered: the opprobrious name bestowed on her darling had called forth on the cheeks of Alice a glow of anger she was unaccustomed

customed to feel, but which mingled piety and prudence made her refrain from expressing in words. Margaret, terrified at the baroness's violence, had clung closer to the good dame, and was endeavouring to suppress her tears, while, on the contrary, the little unbending Isabel, regardless of blows or threats, appeared resolved to increase her mother's anger by her disregard of it.

"I grieve to hear the voice of discord," said the friar, as he entered: "Heaven guide all, forgive the offender, and direct the offended!"

Though Austin's words were perfectly consonant with his holy function, yet, as they might be applied to either party as that injured, the baroness made a short reply, but Isabel running up to the friar, said—"I pray you, dear father, tell me what is a bastard? I know it is nothing wicked, because Margaret is a bastard; but be it what it may, as she is my sister, I will be the same."

The

The resignation, mildness, and humility, that usually marked the features of the friar, for a moment gave place to the deep crimson of anger: his bent form became erect, and his eyes sparkled with a vivacity and rage that made the baroness shrink within herself with conscious inferiority; but as suddenly suppressing these emotions, he gently ejaculated a prayer, and turning with mildness to Isabel, he replied—"A bastard, my sweet innocent, is a name given by the unfeeling and narrow-minded, to children who suffer shame, not from their own errors, but from those of their parents. Margaret can inherit no shame from *her* parents, therefore that name cannot be applicable to her."

"Not applicable to her!" repeated lady Fitzwalter. "It would be well, friar, that you would bestow more time on the duties of your profession, and less in nourishing ideas that can end only in disappointment and remorse."

"Remorse

"Remorse and disappointment are the companions of sin, lady. Alas! I have severely felt them. Heaven shield the children of my noble friend from the cause, and they will never feel the effect."

"*My* actions and their motives," replied lady Fitzwalter, looking maliciously at the friar, "are open to the world; *I* need no subterfuge to cover them, and therefore will not be dictated to by any priest whatever."

"The actions of all," said Austin, "are open to the inspection of Heaven, however they may be concealed from man, and the subterfuges of deceit are developed at the time appointed. To dictate becomes not a servant of the church, neither is it consonant with my will nor inclination; but to stand forth in the defence of truth and innocence is my privilege, not only as a priest, but as a man. In this conversation, however, I have unwittingly offended, for I simply replied to the sweet Isabel's question, as I could

I could have no idea that any one could bestow an epithet of shame on the eldest daughter of the noble Fitzwalter."

"That title cannot be disputed," answered she; "but surely some difference ought to be made between a legitimate and a natural child?"

"They are distinctions I cannot enter into," returned the friar, calmly, "as, in this case, I consider them not applicable."

Alice, who felt the utmost uneasiness to have Margaret present at a conversation which she knew would not fail to make an impression on her susceptible mind, taking her by the hand, withdrew, as did also the attendant of Isabel with her young charge, leaving the baroness alone with the father, who, after some short conversation, also took his leave.

CHAP-

CHAPTER XIII.

THE baron Fitzwalter had been dead somewhat more than two years, when a grand tournament, to be held at Westminster, was proclaimed throughout England, and to which all the British nobility were invited, either to be actors or spectators. The baroness, who had never visited the capital, resolved to profit by this opportunity, and at once to display her riches and gratify her vanity, by appearing to the world as the widow of Fitzwalter.

This resolution once formed, the whole family were busied in preparation for the journey, the lady Fitzwalter making her arrangements for an absence of at least

least some months. Of Alice and Margaret she took little notice; but for Isabel, she left her under the care of her usual attendant, with a strict prohibition that no communication whatever should be held between the children.

Elegantly accoutred, mounted upon a beautiful palfrey, and attended by a large train of dependents, attired in new liveries, emblazoned with the arms of Fitzwalter, the baroness at length left the castle, and took the road to the metropolis.

During the baron's life, his absence, though for ever so short a space, was accustomed to throw a gloom over his dependents; but not so that of his widow, whose departure gave almost universal satisfaction, and to no one more particularly than Alice, though she was careful not to express it.

Again did the youthful Margaret skip cheerfully through the apartments of the castle; unrestrained did she, as in her

father's

father's life, speak to the vassals; and what gave her and Alice yet more satisfaction, they, without reproof, could every afternoon visit Austin in his cell, and join in his prayers at the old chapel.

The baroness had not left the castle more than two months, when the attendant of Isabel was seized with a malignant fever, which in a short time terminated her life; and as there was not any person so immediately proper as Alice to take on them the care of Isabel, she necessarily resumed that charge, using the precaution, however, to send a messenger to the baroness, to apprise her of the change.

Surrounded by the pleasures of a court, and dazzled by the attentions paid her rank and fortune, lady Fitzwalter thought little of home, and Isabel became at most a secondary consideration; she therefore returned back an answer more moderate than she was accustomed, that, for the present, Isabel must remain

 under

under the care of Alice, until she could select some person to replace her former attendant. Involved in her new pursuits, this promise was neglected, if not forgotten; for not only months, but even three years, passed without any alteration in the arrangement that had taken place.

The inhabitants of the castle seldom heard from the baroness; and Margaret had attained her fourteenth, and Isabel her eleventh year, before they were informed they might speedily expect her, not as the widow of Fitzwalter, but as the wife of the lord De Launcy, she having, during the last year of her residence in and near the metropolis, married the baron of that name.

Whether lady De Launcy did not possess by nature that fund of tenderness which most mothers feel for an only child, or that the difference of Isabel's character from her own estranged it, certain it is, she had never shewn those

proofs

proofs of affection for her that might be expected, and her pride, rather than her love, apparently actuated her conduct towards her. To consider her as the heiress of Fitzwalter gratified her vanity; but to have conciliated her affection, it would have been necessary for her to have been as sensible of the advantages of rank and fortune as herself.

On the baroness's return she was accompanied by her lord, and though the vassals did not dare omit the usual mark of respect of going to meet them, yet no sound of joy testified their satisfaction. The lady they had never loved, and for their new lord, his haughty and distant demeanour did not inspire them with warmer sentiments. He had attended the king when he first came to England, and had since been high in his favour, and repeatedly employed in several embassies to foreign courts.

De Launcy, when he married lady Fitzwalter, had been a widower some

years, with only one son, the fruit of his former marriage; and though he was distinguished by courtly employments, and receiving an ample appointment therefrom, yet his paternal patrimony was small, and lady Fitzwalter's fortune a desirable addition.

The news of lady De Launcy's return, as it caused no joy among the dependents, neither did it among those more immediately concerned. Alice, though she was careful to conceal her thoughts, remembered the former indignities too well not to shudder at the idea of their being renewed; and for Margaret, though then young, they had made too deep an impression to be erased by a three years' absence. For Isabel, as from the baroness she had never experienced that tender affection which mothers alone can feel, neither did she experience that attachment which is the natural result. Alice, Margaret, and friar Austin, she felt, loved her sincerely, and to her young

and

and susceptible heart they appeared the dearest friends she had in the world. This idea was, however, strongly discountenanced by Alice and the friar, both of whom endeavoured to inspire her with that duty she owed by nature to the baroness.

On the arrival of the lord and lady De Launcy, the latter, notwithstanding her former apathy, could not forbear testifying her astonishment at the growth and improvement of both the children. She embraced Isabel with an affection she had not shewn heretofore, but Margaret she regarded with the same averted eye.

The baron's conduct was similar: he appeared studious to conciliate the affection of Isabel, but to Margaret he assumed all the haughtiness with which he addressed his dependents; and happy was she when dismissed from the hall to her apartment, and found herself pressed

in the maternal arms of the affectionate dame.

Though she had suppressed her tears in the presence of lord and lady De Launcy, she gave them free vent on the bosom of Alice.—"Oh, dame!" at length exclaimed she, "though my dear father has been dead five years, I well recollect him; I remember his seating me on his knee, kissing my cheeks and forehead, pressing me to his bosom, and while he called me his second Blanch, the tears falling from his eyes upon my face and hands: and to see that hateful lord De Launcy placed in the very chair where he was accustomed to sit, at the very board where he used to preside, and drinking out of the very silver cup which was appropriated to him, I thought my heart would have burst. Oh, dame! I well know that both friar Austin and you will condemn me, but at that moment I wished to possess a giant's strength,

strength, or rather that Heaven had made me a man, that I might have shewn, that though an alien to my father's fortune, I am none to his blood."

Margaret's temper was uncommonly mild; this effusion, therefore, the more astonished Alice. She however at length succeeded in calming the agitation of her spirits, by the pious reasoning she made use of on the occasion; at the same time pointing out to her the inconveniences that might arise from Isabel adopting her sentiments, as her temper, though generous, noble, and open, was, notwithstanding her youth, unyielding, where she supposed herself or those she loved injured.

In the evening, Isabel being engaged with her mother, Alice and Margaret walked to the cave, where Alice related to the friar the agitation of her charge.

Like the good dame, he strongly recommended calmness—"Time, my beloved child," said he, "brings strange

things to pass, and to bear with impatience the state in which it has pleased Providence to place us is sinful. By the loss of your dear father's will (for well do I know he had one) the whole power over you devolves on lady De Launcy; it has, therefore, for years been the study both of your friend Alice and myself, to sooth, not to provoke her; and though I am far from recommending dissimulation, yet common prudence requires you to conduct yourself in a similar manner, not only on your own account, but in consideration that she is lord Fitzwalter's widow."

"My dear father," replied Margaret, "I hope I shall never forget myself so far as to act otherwise. Your commands, and those of my good dame, are sacred to me, as I am convinced they are dictated by rectitude; but indeed I cannot forget the harshness of lady De Launcy before she left the castle, not only to me, but to Isabel and dame Alice. I well remember,

remember, though I never mentioned it before, the opprobrious names she bestowed upon me, and which I am assured neither you nor my dame think I deserve; for if I did, then must my blessed mother have been an ill woman, which I know is false, for both you, father, and dame Alice, loved her, and speak of her with the highest respect, and even at times call her the sainted Blanch."

"Margaret," replied the father, "you are no longer a child, therefore we shall not treat you as one. Of your father's honour, or your mother's chastity, neither Alice nor myself have the smallest doubt; but a stronger testimony than ours is wanting, and without which we should hazard all. Let this information suffice, and lock it in your bosom. Unheeded I have, since the baron's death, watched over you with a scrutinizing attention, and though the baroness has given some cause of complaint, yet it

was not sufficient to make me throw off a mask, which it is your interest I should wear some time longer. Her absence of three years I regard as a favourable event, as during that period you have escaped the violence and meanness of her temper. Bear up, therefore, some years longer; time may assist our wishes, or should it not, at least we will make a bold effort, and if we fail, Margaret, we will submit as Christians to a blow that human wisdom could not prevent."

The friar's discourse was not entirely intelligible to Margaret; she however felt that the good man was her friend, and promised to be guided by his counsel, and with somewhat more cheerfulness than she left it, returned to the castle, accompanied by Alice.

At the hour of rest Isabel joined them. She by no means appeared satisfied with the manner in which she had passed the day; she notwithstanding expressed herself pleased with her mother's kindness

to

to her, but for the baron she felt all that repugnance which prejudiced minds experience for a father-in-law. Alice, with her usual probity, combated this disposition, called it weak and sinful, and finally, though she did not convince her young charge, succeeded in making her restrain her dislike within the bounds of prudence

CHAPTER XIV.

THE baron De Launcy's employments at court did not permit him to be long absent from it, and the amusements and bustle of the capital being far more suited to the temper of the baroness than retirement, it was not designed to prolong their visit to Northumberland beyond the summer season. On her return, she resolved to take Isabel with her; and time having, if not eradicated her dislike to Margaret, at least weakened her fears on her account, she determined to leave her at the castle.

In lady De Launcy's resolve concerning her daughter, the baron entirely coincided—a wary negociator for the king

his

his master, he was not less skilful in arrangements for the future aggrandizement of himself and family; and which way could that be so easily effected as by an union hereafter between his son, Richard De Launcy, and Isabel? These schemes he, however, divulged to no one; time was necessary to bring them to perfection, all that could be done in the present instance being to give the young people an opportunity of becoming acquainted, that as they increased in years, familiarity might the more easily be ripened into affection.

The baroness's designs respecting the future destination of Isabel made her consider her fondness for Margaret with less acrimony than usual. She had no doubt but time and absence would speedily destroy so youthful a partiality, and that at a proper age Isabel, introduced to a life of splendour and pleasure, would have as great an objection as herself to admitting a sharer in her fortune.

Six

Six months that the baron and his lady passed in Northumberland at length elapsed, and preparations began to be made for their removal, when, for the first time, lady De Launcy publicly declared her intention of taking her daughter with her.

This news was a heavy blow, not only on Isabel, but also on Margaret and Alice, who both loved her with that warmth of affection that youth, innocence, and the early promise of a noble and generous disposition, is sure to claim from kindred minds.

The first evening after receiving the intelligence, with more melancholy than was usual to the party, Alice, with her beloved children, as she frequently called them, walked to St. Margaret's to inform the friar of the arrangement which had given them such uneasiness. Even the father did not hear it unmoved. He had flattered himself that the strong affection the sisters had for each other would

would grow up with them, and take so deep a root as to render it permanent as their lives. Isabel's youth and removal appeared to crush this idea; but, unwilling to increase their depression by shewing the effect the intelligence had upon him, he treated it lightly, but at the same time strictly enjoined Isabel to persevere in her affection to Margaret, as a duty she owed the memory of her father.

Isabel, alternately throwing her arms around each, in broken sentences promised all that the friar recommended, with that firmness that particularly marked her character.—"You need not charge me to love Margaret, father," said she: "is she not my dear sister? and though I may be taken from her, I will be torn to pieces before I forget her!—No, no! if you think I am likely to be such a weak wicked girl, pray that God may take me before I become so. One of my mother's women said some days ago, because

cause she saw me sad, that she wondered how I could weep, when in a few years I should be mistress of the castle, and lady of the domain. You may be angry, father, and so will dame, but I asked her how long first? and she said, in less than ten years; and though it is a long while, yet it made me glad, for then Margaret and I will live together with Alice; and for you, father, if you will not come to us, why we will go to you, for I love even this great dreary cave with my friends around me, better than the sumptuous carved hall at the castle, with lord De Launcy in the upper seat, for I know it is by his advice that I am to be removed."

"My dear child," replied the father, taking her hand, "I fear my injunctions will have little weight, for you speedily forget them. To obey your mother in all lawful commands, and in what does not interfere with your duty to Heaven and your fellow-creatures, is a submis-

sion

sion she has a right to expect, and you an equal right to fulfil. She has also now given lord De Launcy a power over you, by making him her husband: submit, therefore, without murmur, and be assured that all in the end will be for the best, and that patience, rectitude, and an approving conscience, will effect what violence and resistance strive in vain to accomplish.—For you, Margaret," continued the friar, "should you ever forget the affection of Isabel, you would be yet more inexcusable: her extreme youth might prove some excuse, but you have the advantage of three years, and not only that, but in dame Alice a monitor, who during her life will never let you forget your duty."

"When I forget to love my Isabel, father," replied Margaret, "I must first have forgotten myself. No, I will never cease to pray that we may again be together. Ah! I wish we could be even in one of the poorest huts in the hamlet, with

with dame Alice; she would be our dear mother, and we her dutiful children."

"Isabel," replied the friar, "has already a mother; persuade her then, Margaret, to submit without repugnance to what is unavoidable, rather than increase her dislike by wishes that are impossible, and would be ungrateful for her to join in."

After some more discourse the friar and his friends separated. Isabel, sobbing and clinging round him, was some time before Alice could calm her agitation: nor was the good man unmoved; his eyes overflowing with tears, he repeatedly blessed her, and prayed that the saints would keep her in their especial protection.

Some time after their departure, Austin's meditations were broken upon by the entrance of David.—"Welcome, my worthy friend!" said the friar: "but what brings you here this evening? you have

have already visited me once this day, and surely you might have spared yourself this second fatigue?"

"My gracious master," answered David, "in the hour of distress, to whom can the suffering fly but to those whom they know will kindly sooth their woes, and teach them to bear them?"

"If that is your case, my honest David, I would that my power equalled my will: but, alas! I have nothing but counsel to offer, and the prayers of a contrite sinner. But say, what is amiss? The faithful servant of my Fitzwalter has a right to all my attention and friendship."

"My good master, forgive the loquacity of an old man! My ancestors have been vassals to the lords of Fitzwalter these two hundred years. In the halls of the castle they have eat their bread—in its chambers have they yielded up their souls; in the cloisters of the chapel are they laid side by side, and

against

against the wall is a memento of their merits, erected by the generosity of their masters: not one, in the period I have mentioned, has suffered the disgrace of being discarded until myself. Thank Heaven, however, that blow came not from the house of Fitzwalter, but from one whom Providence, only for a time, permits to usurp his place."

"Discarded!" repeated the friar—"I surely misunderstood you? So flagrant a mark of disrespect cannot, I think, be shewn to the memory of my friend, as to discard so old and faithful a servant?"

"Lord De Launcy, in the presence of his lady, informed me he had no further occasion for my services. He was pleased to say I performed them with an ill grace, and perhaps he spoke true, for though I was master of my words, I was not hypocrite enough to be so of my looks. On my own account, I declare I should rather rejoice than grieve at this event; but for the sake of my wife I severely

I severely feel it, for her declining years render her unfit to be cast upon the world, which must inevitably be the ease, if the cottage which she has so long resided in be taken from us."

"David," replied the friar, "for the first time you make me feel the loss of fortune: but bear up, my good friend! lowering as the prospect may now appear, you will yet, I trust, live to present the cup in the great hall to the lawful owner of the domain."

"The Virgin grant I could once see that day!—how readily would I lay down my life! As it is, I fear to die, for weak as I am, my testimony may be of service."

"The most essential: but we have taken every precaution in our power, and should it please Heaven to remove us all, still in my brethren, the friars minors, would our Margaret find true and indefatigable friends."

It being near the hour of vespers, David

soon

soon after took his leave, and left the father to his orisons.

At the appointed time the lord and lady De Launcy, accompanied by Isabel, and escorted by a splendid retinue, left the castle. The grief of the sisters at this separation, or that of Alice, though moderated by reason and reflection, would be difficult to describe. Margaret, clasped in the arms of Alice, and concealing her anguish in her bosom, would not raise her eyes to see her beloved companion depart, while the good dame, in silent anguish, strove in vain to suppress the tears that a separation from so amiable a child forced from her. Isabel, on the contrary, gave unrestrained scope to her vexation, and, with all the energy that marked her character, no sooner saw the horses and retinue than she screamed aloud, and peremptorily refused to go. Lady De Launcy's violence was ill calculated to overcome this obstinacy. Isabel disregarded both

threats

threats and blows, and on the servants, by their lady's order, attempting to place her on the palfrey prepared for her, with the vehemence of passion she even struck them.

Alice, grieved at this conduct, both on Isabel's account, and the effect it might have on the baroness in respect to Margaret, gently disengaged herself from the latter, and approaching the yet-resisting Isabel, she said, in a low voice—"My dear child, how soon have you forgotten the good father's lessons of shewing obedience to your mother! She will doubtless think this obstinacy is dictated to you by Margaret and myself, and in consequence we shall experience her displeasure. Go then, let me conjure you, as becomes a dutiful child. I have no doubt we shall meet again, until when, the Holy Virgin guide, direct, and bless you!"

As suddenly as a shower succeeds a thunder-storm, and calms the fury of the

tempest,

tempest, so at this gentle reproof did Isabel's tears allay the anger she had given way to; turning to Alice, she threw her arms around her neck, and in a voice scarcely articulate, sobbed obedience.

The baroness, vexed at the delay, and perhaps not less so at the power she could not but observe that Alice had over the mind of her daughter, with increased acrimony commanded the domestics to place her upon the horse, at the same time regarding the dame with a malignancy that she neither endeavoured nor indeed could suppress.—"Pardon me, lady," said Alice, with her usual mildness, "but I am accustomed to the lady Isabel: this little petulance over, she will be grieved for having offended you; gentleness will always recall her to a remembrance of what is due to you and to her duty."

"I will oblige her to remember it," answered lady De Launcy, with vehemence.

mence. Then turning to the domestics, she added—" Wait no longer—obey me; place her upon her horse!—I am resolved to overcome this childish obstinacy."

The domestics, though unwillingly, again advanced towards her, and again Alice spoke in a low persuasive voice, when Isabel, with a haughtiness which astonished all around her, said—" Were my dear father living, which of you would dare to treat me thus?"

With these words she, without looking back, rushed from the hall, and the cavalcade soon after left the castle.

Austin, from a hill at some distance from his cell, saw the departure of the baron and his lady, and truly judging of the state of mind of both Alice and Margaret, hastened to the castle, where he found them, as he expected, plunged in grief. His pious exhortations, seconded by those of Alice, at length in some measure soothed the sorrow of Margaret; for true religion inspires that confi-

dence and hope that never fails to enable us to support our afflictions with fortitude, until by perseverance we overcome them, or, if they are unsurmountable, to endure them with a patience and magnanimity, that in spite of fortune makes us respectable in all the vicissitudes of life.

CHAP-

CHAPTER XV.

THE baron De Launcy had not been long returned to court, when the king, his master, employed him to negociate some political business in Flanders, and which, as it was attended with great state, lady De Launcy, with her daughter, accompanied him. The baron, as from the first, treated Isabel with so distinguished a kindness, that it could not have failed of its effect on her susceptible heart, had she not, in other cases, found him to his dependents harsh, overbearing, and cruel. The lady De Launcy's ruling passion, as before observed, was splendour, rank, and show; and, gratified in that, every other consideration became

secondary—not but she felt a secret satisfaction in producing to the world, particularly as she had no other child, a daughter whose person so early gave the promise of perfection, and whose rank and fortune must hereafter make her a desirable acquisition to the first family in the kingdom.

Richard De Launcy was now somewhat turned of nineteen: in character he resembled his father, and therefore readily entered into his future views, rejoiced at the prospect of an early independence, and regardless of the appendages that might belong thereunto. Isabel's age, however, precluded any immediate step towards perfecting the plan, and when she embarked with the baron and his lady for Flanders, he remained at the court of Henry, waiting promotion.

In the mean time, all was peaceful at the castle of Fitzwalter. Margaret, now approaching towards womanhood, was almost

almost idolized by the vassals of the domain; and as, accompanied by Alice, she visited the sick, or administered the assistance which her contracted means afforded, they would, in the warmth of their hearts, call upon the saints to bless her, and secretly wish they might consider her as the future heiress of the castle. Every care of her education, in the power of Alice, had been exerted, and what extended beyond her knowledge the friar had perfected. He taught her the French and German languages, and gave a polish to the whole of her instruction, that though bred in a lonely dwelling, and surrounded by the mere simple children of nature, her understanding was ripened even beyond her years, her manners unaffected and graceful, and her person such as the fabulous poets or painters might have chosen, to personify beauty, blended with innocence and dignity.

In a small cottage nearer to the moun-

tains, and consequently to the friar's cell, David and his wife had now taken up their abode, and scarcely with less comfort than during the life of Fitzwalter. Alice, with Margaret, visited them daily, and spared no pains to supply their necessities, Alice exerting her industry in spinning flax and wool, which was sold for their support; and Margaret sewing fine works, which were sent to Berwick, and disposed of for the same purpose.

Thus passed nearly three years, when one morning the whole hamlet was alarmed by the appearance of a troop of horsemen, gallantly accoutred, and at whose head rode a leader, distinguished from his fellows by the richness of his dress. On his arrival at the castle, an avant-courier announced the son of the baron De Launcy, who, in reality, had paid this visit, from no motive but to examine the estate he now hoped, in the course of another year or two, to enjoy. Though not received with the satisfaction

tion of an old master, at least he was entertained with the distinction befitting the baroness's son-in-law; and all being arranged, his dinner was served in a state that made his heart exult, as he considered all around him would speedily be his own. It is true, Isabel's age, now barely fourteen, had not suffered her to be consulted; but with such powerful auxiliaries as the baron and the baroness, he could have no reason to doubt a success equal to his wishes.

The repast concluded, Alice requested to be admitted into his presence, which being granted, the good dame entreated to be informed of the baron and his lady's health, as also of that of Isabel.

There was a respectability in the appearance of Alice that commanded attention, and De Launcy immediately answered, that his father and the baroness were well, as was also Isabel; that the former were yet on their embassy, but that the lady Isabel had been for

some months past with a young lady whom she had formed an acquaintance with, at the convent of St. Mary, near Bremen.

"St. Mary, near Bremen!" repeated the dame, crossing herself; but instantly suppressing her surprise, she added—"The blessed Virgin guide her wherever she be! for a more generous or innocent heart never warmed a human bosom."

"If I do not mistake," said De Launcy, "you are the person whom I have heard had the care of the lady Isabel in her infancy, and also of the baron Fitzwalter's natural daughter?"

"I was happy in the care of both the lord Fitzwalter's children," replied Alice. "I can but thank ye for the news of the family's welfare, and take my leave: many an anxious hour have I passed on account of the lady Isabel, and now rejoice at her health and safety."

Thus saying, Alice made her obeisance, and left the hall.

Margaret

Margaret and Alice were mutually rejoiced at this information of Isabel's well-doing, for during her long absence they had seldom heard of her, and then only slightly, by the means of the persons lady De Launcy employed to collect the annual dues from the vassals.

De Launcy, somewhat recovered from his fatigue, explored every part of the castle with the scrutinizing eye of a man who is upon the point of making a purchase, but first wishes to be well apprised of its value. On passing through one of the galleries, Alice and Margaret were seated sewing; and though De Launcy had before no curiosity respecting lord Fitzwalter's eldest daughter, when once seen, she was neither to be overlooked nor yet forgotten. Accustomed from his childhood to a court, diffidence formed no part of his character; but all advances towards familiarity were cut off by the cold and repellant manner of Margaret. Common polite-

ness could not, however, suffer her to refuse conversing with him on trifling subjects, though, as speedily as she could without giving offence, she rose, and wishing him a good evening, with Alice left the gallery.

De Launcy, after Margaret's departure, remained for some time lost in thought. Isabel, when she went to Flanders, was little more than eleven years old; he was then nineteen, and had merely considered her as not an unpleasant appendage to the estate of Fitzwalter, which title, by the favour of the king, he also hoped some future day to get conferred upon himself. Three years had passed since that period; he was now twenty-two, and by letters from his father was informed, that with lady De Launey's consent, the intended marriage should be consummated as soon as Isabel had completed her sixteenth year. Intoxicated with this idea, his whole thoughts turned on rank and riches, until the sight of Margaret put them

all

all to flight, and made him feel that he was susceptible of even a stronger passion than avarice. Plunged in these reflections, the bell tolled the hour of eight, without De Launcy having explored more of the castle, when a domestic, named Stephen, informed him that supper was served in the hall.

"Request the baron Fitzwalter's daughter to favour me with her company," said De Launcy. "I am a stranger, and the honours of the house done by so fair a maid will enhance the satisfaction I shall receive from my visit."

"Dame Alice and the lady Margaret have been gone out almost two hours," answered the servant.

"Put back the supper then; I will wait her return. She scarcely ventures far in the evening from the castle?"

Stephen was warmly attached to his master's house, and naturally too loquacious to be prudent, knew no gratifica-

tion superior to conversing on what respected them.

"By my faith," replied he to De Launcy, "but she does, where I would not venture alone at twilight for the king's ransom—as far as the old chapel, and to father Austin's cell. Neither she nor dame Alice seem to know what fear is; but in truth they are, I believe, safe, for no mortal man living would hurt either, and for spirits, I have heard they are not permitted to visit the like of them, unless for some great and good purpose. Another thing is plain: the friar, by his piety and prayers, has all the ghosts that used formerly to haunt the chapel in subjection, and he would sooner cast them into the Red Sea, than suffer them to hurt a hair of either dame Alice or the lady Margaret's head."

De Launcy found he had met one whose loquacity would satisfy his curiosity; he therefore said—"What distinction

tion do you make between the baron Fitzwalter's daughters? I remark you name his natural daughter the lady Margaret; you can give no higher distinction to his legitimate one."

"The vassals all call her," answered he, "the same as they did during the baron's life. Certain it is, he loved the very ground she trod upon; and if she be, as some people give out, a bastard, she is still, as you say, my good master, my lord's *natural* daughter, for she is as like him, not only in person but goodness, as two peas. Marry, well do I remember her mother: many a night have I seen her, and my then young lord, walking through the wood, her light step scarcely pressing the herbage under her feet, and her bright amber-coloured locks flying loosely in the wind, and shining like threads of gold. We all then thought she would have been our lady: but it proved otherwise, for she died in a foreign land,

land, and right sorrowful was my lord: troth I think he never was himself again."

"'Tis strange, if what I have heard be true, that the baron made no provision for the offspring of so warm an attachment," replied De Launcy.

"Too true," answered Stephen, "though David, who was in all my late master's secrets, affirms that the baron had a will; and so in truth doth friar Austin: but none was to be found."

"Who is this friar," said De Launcy, "who was so well informed?"

"That," replied Stephen, "is more than I know, or any person here, except David, who, as I said before, was in all my lord's secrets: but you might as well inquire of one of the old statues in the hall as to ask him. There is not a better tempered fellow living, nor a worthier heart than David's; it is a thousand pities he is so close."

De Launcy's curiosity excited, he questioned

questioned and obtained of Stephen all the information in his power to give: as, friar Austin's first arrival in the country—his madness—his flight—his assuming the holy vocation—his rigid austerity of life—and lastly, his warm attachment to all those who had been estimable to the baron, and most particularly to Margaret. De Launcy making him a trifling present, asked the road to the old chapel, saying he would walk half-an-hour, and then return to supper.

CHAP.

CHAPTER XVI.

ALICE and Margaret, as soon as they left De Launcy, had hastened to the friar, whom they found at vespers in St. Margaret's chapel. Joining his prayers, no conversation passed till all rose from their knees, when Alice exclaimed—"Father, I am convinced, in spite of the cloud that has so long hung over our dearest prospects, all, in the end, will work together for the best. Lord De Launcy's son is our guest at the castle, and welcome may he be, for he brought us news of our Isabel."

"My good dame," answered the friar, "I congratulate you; I can clearly discern

cern that your news is pleasant. That our dear Isabel may remain such as your instructions began to make her is one of my sincerest wishes; and may the virtues and honour she inherits from Fitzwalter predominate over all other qualities in her heart!"

"She is not now with the baroness," replied Alice; "she is upon a visit at the convent of St. Mary, near Bremen."

"St. Mary's!" repeated the friar, in a voice scarcely articulate; "but, sinful wretch that I am! what is the convent of St. Mary to me?—Merciful God!" continued he, raising his hands and eyes to heaven, "accept my contrition, pardon my manifold offences, and dismiss me!"

Never did Margaret recollect seeing the friar thus moved. Before she had attained years of reflection and observation, his frenzied sorrow had given way to mental suffering, without any outward

ward sign, except his woe-worn form, and the heavy dejection that constantly hung over him.

"Dismiss you, father!" repeated Margaret; "surely you do not mean by death? If you do, pray that the same stroke may serve for dame Alice and me, for if we lose you, we have no friend left upon earth."

The energy of Margaret's manner, the tears that filled her eyes, instantly recalled the friar to recollection.—"My beloved child," answered he, "forgive me!—the wish was indeed sinful, but it was involuntary. There are affections, Margaret, which death alone can overcome; and, notwithstanding that grey hairs begin to shade my temples, and the sacred vocation I have adopted, yet, even now, one of these rend my heart. Pity me therefore, my child! I endeavour to act uprightly, but, alas! I am still a man, and cannot forget what formerly

merly constituted the happiness of my life."

"Father," returned Margaret, "you were the most beloved friend of my parents. Oh, consider me as a daughter to you! From their hearts I would, if possible, have chased every care, had Heaven spared them to me; but as it has not, accept the duty I have to bestow, and spare me the distress of seeing your mind thus shaken with sorrow."

As Margaret spoke, she bent her knees before him, when Austin, raising her in his arms, repeatedly blessed her, and at length replied—"Oh, Margaret! thy uncertain situation, thy virtue, and unprotected youth, call for every exertion, and every selfish thought shall sink before them. Thou art now seventeen, and the decisive stroke must soon take place, that fixes thee either high in rank and honour, or dooms thee to remain through life even as thou art. If the first,

first, receive the good as becomes thee; if the latter, remember that our situation here is but transitory, and will speedily pass away."

"Father," replied Margaret, "whatever you judge right, I shall endeavour to obey; but if, by a decisive stroke, you mean ought that may injure our beloved Isabel, upon my knees I conjure you abandon it! for sooner would I forfeit my life, than yield her the smallest vexation."

"The peace and welfare of Isabel is as dear to me as to yourself, and unless she be greatly changed, I think her too nobly minded to be swayed by the paltry consideration of dividing her father's fortune with an elder sister. But should she even deceive our hopes, remember what is due to yourself, to your father's honour, and your mother's chastity. Margaret, they call upon you from their sepulchres to assert your right, and to shew them to the world as they

really

really were. In this very chapel, at this ruined altar, did they plight their mutual vows, six days before they departed for Germany. The priest who united them was a Benedictine, and soon after went on a mission to India, since when we have not been able to trace him. Alice and David, who were present at the sacred ceremony, are our only vouchers; for the strange loss of your father's will, and with it your mother's confession, has deprived us of all other. A copy of that confession also remained in the hands of a friar at Bremen, but, as if all things conspired to counteract the right, the good man removed, and after tracing him for years without effect, we found he died only two years since in the holy land, where he had gone on a pilgrimage; but what became of his papers, if he had any, we could never be certified. You will perhaps wonder how, buried in the solitude of my cell, I could learn even so much; but know,

Margaret,

Margaret, though apparently inactive, no precaution has been neglected. After the loss of your dear father, fearful that another sudden death should deprive you of the testimonies left, I not only caused dame Alice, but also David, to give their oaths to every particular event. These I transmitted to the Franciscans at Berwick, and by their means made the inquiries I have informed you of. I likewise to them gave my own testimony respecting my knowledge of the baron's will and its contents, praying them, in case of my decease, to spare no pains in——"

The fall of a fragment of stone at some small distance caused the friar to cease; but all being again still, Margaret replied—"My dear father, pardon my inexperience. I am convinced you have done all for the best; yet surely my mother's honour should have been exculpated long since?"

"But how, Margaret, was that to be effected?

effected? During your grandfather's life, duty, and the request of your dying mother, kept your father silent. After the baron's death, prudence made him wish to continue the deception, until, by economy, he could clear the incumbrance, and leave his beloved child an estate worthy the eldest daughter of the house of Fitzwalter. This plan was, in some degree, effected, though not complete, at his decease, when, at all events, the truth would have been disclosed, but for the villany of secreting the will."

"If it was secreted from a fear of my claims injuring those of Isabel," replied Margaret, "how little could they judge of my heart who took that step! Never yet did I feel a sentiment for her but of the most sincere affection. Yes, father, I am content to wave all claim but that of being lord Fitzwalter's lawful daughter; and that title, now I know my right, death itself shall not make me forego. The blessed spirits of my parents,

rents, as you truly say, call upon me to proclaim my mother's chastity and my father's honour.—Oh!" continued she, throwing herself before the altar, and kissing the marble step, "here did they pledge their faith, and receive the nuptial benediction; and here doth their daughter call upon the saints to assist her in clearing their fame, and shewing them unspotted to the world."

"My dear child," said Alice, "we have rich and powerful enemies to contend with; and the baron having married previous to his espousing Edith Mountford, will, I fear, by her father's testament, leave the estate greatly in her power."

"Be it so," replied Margaret: "still was my mother no unchaste wanton, as I once heard the cruel baroness name her. I am no bastard, dame.—Oh, father! though I have concealed it in my own heart, how deeply have I felt those epithets! In such a case now, methinks I could

I could return scorn for scorn. Let her take all—drive me to want, to penury—still the consciousness of my parents' honour should support me."

"Again I repeat, prudence, yet awhile, Margaret, must still guide us. You want four years of being of age, until which the lady De Launcy can, undoubtedly, claim a right over you. That consideration has for years kept me silent, as also Alice and David."

After some more conversation, the gloom of night, which began to overshadow the chapel, made them think of separating, the father conducting them to the castle gate, where he bade them good-even.

When Margaret and Alice entered, De Launcy was in the hall, wrapped in his cloak.—"You walk late, fair maid," said he, addressing Margaret: "are you not alarmed in those lonely paths?"

"Our errand was of a nature to pre-

clude fear," replied Alice. "The evening was fine, and we walked to the old chapel."

"You have a good friar there, I understand?" answered De Launcy, fixing his eyes inquisitively on Margaret.

"You heard truly," answered Alice.

"I wished to entreat you to honour me with your company at supper," said De Launcy; "the table has no pleasure for me, unless a lady presides."

"I am sorry for it," answered Margaret, coolly. "I am not accustomed to take my seat in the hall when the lady De Launcy resides here, and must be excused accepting the invitation of a stranger."

"That punctilio is surely too far stretched," replied he. "It would be injustice to punish me for lady De Launcy not being sensible of your merit. You are formed to grace the hall of the castle of Fitzwalter; let

me

me enjoy the honour of seating you there?"

As he spoke, he attempted to take her hand; but recoiling, she said—"You! From whence arises *your* right to place me there?"

"I plead no right," replied De Launcy; "I only asked a favour, which I should have been honoured by your granting me."

"I am sorry you ask what I must refuse. Good-night!"

So saying, with Alice, she left the hall, and retired to her apartment.

What had passed at the old chapel employed all Margaret's thoughts, nor was she speedily tired of conversing of it; for though she had always been assured, from the discourse of Alice and the friar, that her parents were lawfully united, yet she now possessed the positive certainty of even the time and place, together with the reason that had made it so long concealed.

From a discourse respecting her parents, she reverted to the friar. "My dear dame," said she, "my satisfaction of this night met with a considerable drawback at the visible uneasiness of our dear friend Austin. I am convinced some severe sorrow hangs over him: would to Heaven I could remove it! Did you not mark his violent emotion at the mention of St. Mary's convent?"

"I did," replied Alice.

"Notwithstanding his extreme meagreness and grey hairs, he has not even now the appearance of age," said Margaret. "Pardon me, dame, but indeed I could not help surmising that he had formerly loved some one that dwelt there."

"You perhaps judged truly," answered Alice. "He is, I believe, now not more than fifty; but what little I know respecting him, as he chooses it concealed, I am not at liberty to disclose."

"My

"My dear dame," said Margaret, "I meant not to express curiosity, though I confess it has frequently been excited from the accounts that have casually reached me. My father loved him, and you highly honour him; I therefore know that he is a good man, and all other information is superfluous."

Such conversation filled up the hours till Margaret and Alice retired to rest.

CHAPTER XVII.

On the ensuing morning, as father Austin, after matins, was seated at the entrance of his cell, he perceived a man, whose appearance bespoke him of rank, advancing towards him.

"Good-day, father," said he. "My name is De Launcy; I come to crave your advice and assistance, which, I hope, you will not refuse me?"

"My advice and assistance, in all that is good, you may command," replied Austin, coldly, "though I cannot conjecture in what the advice and assistance of a poor Franciscan may be necessary to the son of the lord De Launcy."

"In this case, father, you can be of the

the utmost service; and, to wave all ceremony, I must first inform you, that I love Margaret Fitzwalter, and am willing to make her my bride——"

"Make her your bride!" interrupted the friar. "I thought you were unacquainted—that you never saw her till yesterday?"

"Granting it so, father, is she not made to be beloved?"

"As far as outward form, I should judge so; but are you convinced that your minds will assimilate? Are you sure of her concurrence to your desires?"

"No, father; but your influence will have its proper effect. Every one is acquainted with the deference she pays to your opinion."

"On this subject I shall decline giving it," answered the friar, "particularly if it might influence her, as marriage, more than any other event in life, ought to be free and unprejudiced. The affection, too, you have conceived for her is so

young, that it will easily be combated; for it is surely no difficult task to forget what we have only momentarily known?"

"I do not wish to forget her," replied De Launcy, "nor will I endeavour it."

"At your pleasure. I am not authorized to answer for Margaret; but well I know the purity of her mind will not suffer her to descend to clandestine addresses. Are the lord and lady De Launcy apprised of your inclination? Do they authorize your offer?"

"As yet it has been impossible to ask their concurrence; but were it otherwise, father, am I the *only* person who hold *secrets* from lord and lady De Launcy?"

"That I know not, nor care," answered the friar, with some haughtiness; "the ties of blood and duty demand that respect from you that is not requisite from others."

"Father," said De Launcy, "let us understand each other. I am not to learn

learn that you hereafter mean to produce Margaret to the world as the baron Fitzwalter's legitimate daughter; but, on my honour, no motive of interest sways me. On the contrary, both my father and lady De Launcy have consented to unite in giving me their sanction to espouse the lady Isabel, as sole heiress of Fitzwalter. I build, however, upon my father's affection; and, Margaret once my wife, which, with her concurrence and your assistance, could speedily be effected, it would become his interest and honour to exert his influence with the king, to acknowledge her right, as joint heiress to the late baron."

"Young man," answered Austin, "should Margaret stoop to any secondary means to ascertain her right, I myself should doubt her claim to such a father as Fitzwalter. You say, on your honour, you have no interested views in the alliance; but may I not distrust the honour of a man who, concealed in the

shades of night, steals upon the unsuspicious, and with a meanness that upright minds disdain, robs them of their secrets?"

"Friar," replied De Launcy, warmly, "you forget yourself; though your habit protects you, you should remember what is due to my rank."

"While you remember it yourself, I shall not easily forget," replied Austin. "My habit, as you truly say, protects me, nor is this the first time that, united with those holy vows which shall ever hold me, it hath protected others.—Elated with youth and prosperity, young lord, if you think you may act with impunity, you mistake; all good men will despise you, if you transgress those bounds which are the only safeguards of society. By the pitiful meanness of listening, you have possessed yourself of Margaret's secrets. But would it not have been more nobly done, to have made your proposals first? Would that

not

not more effectually have shewn your disinterestedness? You might then have been entitled to our confidence and to our thanks."

"And how are you assured that I listened, friar?" said De Launcy.

"By your being informed of what you could not otherwise have known. Go, go, young man; learn, I repeat, to respect yourself, and others will respect you. Or, should you ever more descend to so derogatory a deed, remember first," said he, ironically, "to take the feathers from your hat. Those decorations are, doubtless, meant to distinguish you from the vulgar, and to bespeak your quality and honour—in such employments they are superfluous, and often lead to discovery; as witness the plume that I found this morning in the aisle of the chapel, and which is similar to that you now wear."

De Launcy remained silent.

After a pause, father Austin conti-

nued—"Believe me, I am no one's enemy, therefore I cannot be yours. Truly will I lay before Margaret what you have said; but no word or action of mine shall influence her judgment. As to her cause, that I leave to Him who has protected her from the cradle, not doubting but his powerful arm will fix her in the state most conducive to her happiness."

"By my soul, father," said De Launcy, "I came not intentionally for such a purpose as you infer. My curiosity was, undoubtedly, excited, by an account I had heard of you; and being also told that Margaret had walked hither, I came to seek her. On entering the chapel, your discourse arrested my attention, and I involuntarily listened unto it."

"You will excuse me conversing longer on the subject," answered the friar; "I have, at this hour, occupations to which all others must give place."

With these words the father bowed slightly, and took his way to the chapel, while

while De Launcy, vexed at the ill success of his application, returned to the castle. Revolving future plans, he passed the remainder of the day in his own chamber, complaining of a slight indisposition, but cautiously observant on all that passed.

Towards evening, Margaret and Alice, who were far from suspecting the discovery De Launcy had made, took their usual walk to the chapel, where they found the friar and David in earnest discourse. The father, after bidding them welcome, candidly related all that had passed between himself and De Launcy, though without comment, leaving the answer entirely to Margaret.

With fixed attention she remained silent until he concluded, when she replied, a blush tinging her cheek—" To answer methodically to the strange relation you have made, I must begin by the affection you say De Launcy professes for me. I think you call it love, father;

father; if so, how erroneous an opinion had I formed of that passion! Methought it meant friendship and esteem, in the most extensive meaning of the words; but now I find it otherwise, for what friendship or esteem can De Launcy have for me on so short an acquaintance? The love I feel for you, for dame Alice, my Isabel, and honest David, has been growing for years, and like a tree whose strong root is immovably fixed, must shatter the soil that nurtured it ere it can be destroyed or displaced. Such alone, father, is the love that I comprehend, and such, I am convinced, is that which my friends bear to me; I will, therefore, none of this strange sudden affection, that springs up like a summer flower, and doubtless fades as soon. I love neither the lord De Launcy nor his son, and am grieved the latter should bestow a thought upon me after I quitted his presence."

The whole of Margaret's words and manner convinced her friends, that there were

were no hopes for De Launcy. Austin therefore replied—"As you appear entirely determined in this business, I shall not scruple to speak my sentiments.—Though I have no doubt of the efficacy of De Launcy's espousing our cause, yet I confess I would rather owe all to right and justice, than submit to an obligation so humiliating, and for which I should think you paid far too dear, by giving your hand, where you could not, without hesitation, bestow your heart."

The friar then proceeded to inform them, that he meant to lose no time in bringing forward Margaret's claim, which, if contended, he would lay before the throne, and personally demand of Henry the Seventh protection and justice for the daughter of his friend Fitzwalter.

As Margaret and Alice walked homeward, passing a small wood they met De Launcy, apparently plunged in thought. At their approach he however shook off his reverie, and advancing,

cing, said—"Fortune favours me to-night: will you permit me to attend you home?"

Margaret bowed coldly, but remained silent.

"The friar is a happy man," continued he, taking his place by Margaret's side, "that can thus tempt youth and beauty to brave the horrors that are said to attend his dwelling, and to encounter the damps of the night air."

"For his happiness," replied Margaret, "I cannot answer; but if happiness, as we are taught to believe, is the result of virtue, he is doubtless so."

"I am, unfortunately, not in his favour. I consulted him this morning on a subject very near my heart, but he listened unpropitiously."

"Might I advise, then," said Margaret, "relinquish it. I never yet found his judgment erroneous."

"That counsel is more easily given than adopted," answered he. "I am convinced

convinced you know to what I allude, and though I was unfortunate in my application to him, yet may I flatter myself with a patient hearing from you?"

"I know not in what I can be interested that concerns you," replied Margaret. "However, if you request it, you may depend upon my candid opinion."

A youth, plainly attired, of a commanding height, and, as it should seem by his manner (for the evening was too far advanced to render his features discernible), of superior rank to the peasantry around, at that moment turned from an opposite path, and advancing towards them, said—"I pray ye direct me, if in your power, the shortest way to father Austin's cell. I know he dwells near this spot, for I had a direction from yonder cottages; but, unacquainted with the country, have bewildered myself in the wood."

"You

"You are a stranger then?" replied Alice.

"I am, lady; but am no stranger to the character of the pious father Austin."

Alice then directed the youth through the wood to the old chapel, where, if he did not find the friar, she informed him of the path to the cave. The stranger bowed, and with thanks was turning from them, when Margaret, who had not spoken, addressing him, said—"Good youth, walk as speedily as you can through the wood, for the evening draws in, and the way, though short, is intricate to those unacquainted with it; beware, also, as you leave the path to cross to the chapel, for there is a deep pit on the left side."

The youth had instantly stopped when Margaret addressed him.

"Heaven shield you, lady!" replied he. "I will cautiously observe your counsel. The good-will you bear to others revert upon your own head!"

With

With these words he pursued his way, and Margaret, with Alice and De Launcy, walked forward to the castle.

CHAP-

CHAPTER XVIII.

De Launcy again attempted to prevail upon Margaret to sup with him in the hall; but declining the invitation, she retired to her chamber, consenting, however, at his earnest request, to see him on the ensuing morning, as he declared he had business to communicate of the utmost importance.

"I wonder what that youth wanted with father Austin?" said Margaret, to Alice, after they had retired. "It is evident he is a stranger; methought, too, he had rather a foreign accent."

"Doubtless he comes," replied the dame, "to relieve his mind from some sorrow that oppresses it: if so, the good man

man will speak comfort to his wounded spirit."

"I trust he may. Perhaps the loss of tender parents. Poor youth! if it be so, how much should I pity him!"

"If he has been guilty of any gross error, I shall pity him far more," replied Alice. "The loss of affectionate parents, though hard to support, is to be overcome by reason and reflection; but an evil and reproaching conscience who can bear?—it is like a vulture perpetually gnawing at the heart."

"He appears very young, dame; his deportment too was gentle, and his voice sounded as one familiar to my ear."

The discourse then turned upon different subjects, and among others, the interview with De Launcy on the ensuing day.—"I neither respect nor esteem the young man," said Margaret, "therefore wish at once to convince him of the futility of his paying me attentions which I am predetermined never to return. No,

No, dame," added she, with warmth, "I would sooner bear my father's name without blemish or disgrace, in the meanest cottage, and clothed with the most humble habiliments that poverty could give, rather than be lady of this domain, however just my title, were it to be received as a favour from the baroness De Launcy's son-in-law."

In the morning De Launcy entreated of Margaret the promised audience, and was immediately admitted. At first, some confusion, from being aware of the subject on which he wished to converse, marked Margaret's features; but, reassured by the supporting presence of Alice, she speedily overcame it, and received him with collected firmness. With earnest warmth he made her a tender of his hand and heart, touched slightly on what he had overheard at the chapel, entreated her not to suffer the friar to prejudice him in her opinion, and finally declared, that the whole of his interest should

should be exerted to establish her in her right, was it refused to be acknowledged by the lady De Launcy.

"For your offer permit me to return you my thanks," replied Maragret. "That you do justice to my parents, I also thank you. Honour, as yet, is my only dower; perhaps it may be all I shall ever possess; it therefore befits me to preserve it unsullied, which it could never be, should I listen to a clandestine address from any man. You will therefore excuse me declining this, as derogatory at once to me and to yourself."

De Launcy had hoped to win Margaret to hearken to a private marriage, as he before proposed to the friar, but there was a dignity in her words and manner that at once made him relinquish the thought.

"As to my address being clandestine," answered he, "that circumstances alone have occasioned. I should be proud to acknowledge

acknowledge my attachment in the face of the whole world. Would you but honour me by the smallest gleam of hope, you shall be convinced of the truth of what I assert."

"I should be wanting to you and to myself, not to answer with candour and openness. As a man who has honoured me by the offer of his hand, and as the baroness De Launcy's son-in-law, I should be happy to respect you: but believe me, and receive my decided opinion, we can never be nearer related; I therefore entreat that you neither give yourself nor me further trouble on the subject. My resolution thus frankly declared, permit me to wish you a fairer and a richer bride, one whose claims need no justification, and who feels for you that preference which I conceive necessary to render the state of marriage happy. For my inheritance, I am poor but proud, and wish to owe it to no secondary

ary means; for I cannot stoop to obligation for what, in truth and honour, is my own."

The firmness of Margaret's manner astonished De Launcy. Accustomed to courts, to be refused by a mere girl, educated in a distant county, surrounded by peasants, and the means of information so contracted as hers necessarily were, surpassed his belief. In vain he endeavoured to soften her resolves; but, with a perseverance that left him no room for hope, she arose, and taking the dame's arm, quitted the apartment.

Anger and affronted pride for some time reigned alone in De Launcy's heart. A thousand bitter execrations did he vent against the innocent Alice and the friar, both of whom he regarded as Margaret's advisers: yet, unwilling to relinquish her, he resolved to alter his plan; and as he surmised that Austin would now, as he had made the discovery, bring forward his proofs of her legitima-

cy, he determined that lord and lady De Launcy should receive the first information from himself. Thus resolved, he immediately wrote letters to his father, relating his visit to Northumberland and his discovery at the chapel, but cautiously avoided mentioning his proposals, as those would too completely have explained his motives for the communication. This point arranged, he dispatched a trusty messenger, with orders to make the capital in his way, as there was a report, before he left Westminster, that the king had recalled the lord De Launcy.

CHAP-

CHAPTER XIX.

THE youth who the foregoing evening had inquired the way to the friar's cell, by following the direction of Alice, speedily reached it. At the entrance he hallooed aloud, and was immediately answered by the father.

"Who calls so loud," said he, "at this late hour? If ye have lost your way, I will put you into the right path to the village; or if ye are benighted, to such food and lodging as this cave affords ye are welcome, so ye come in the spirit of peace and good-will to all men."

"That I truly do," replied the youth; "but I have neither lost my way, nor yet am I benighted. My business is

with father Austin; it has brought me many a weary mile, nor do I repent my labour since I trust I have found him."

"You have indeed met the sinner," answered Austin. "But what business can have brought you from far to him is past my conjecture: however, if he can be of service to the meanest creature God hath made, nay even to one whose errors are great as his own, behold him ready. Enter, therefore, good youth; I have flint and steel, and will instantly light my lamp."

The youth entered the cave. The father struck a light, and raised it to the face of his guest.

"The peace of Heaven rest upon you, my son!" said he. "The hand of your great Creator has blessed you with a good exterior; be it your study so to temper your conduct, that your heart and manners may not disgrace so fair a temple. I pray you be seated," pointing to a stone. "Such food as I have I will set before

before you; when you are refreshed, you shall inform me of the business that brought you hither."

The eyes of the youth were fixed upon Austin, the mildness of whose manners, mingled with dignity, inspired him at once with veneration and esteem.—"Father," replied he, "I thank you, but I do not wish for food. Give me your blessing, and then I will enter on my errand."

As he spoke, he bent his knee before the friar, who, laying his hand on his head, said—"A blessing more powerful than mine rest upon thee! In the straight path of rectitude mayest thou walk—may no turbulent passions assail thee—may the flower of thy youth be unsullied, thy middle days honourable, thy age respectable, and thy end that of the virtuous!"

"Rude and unskilled in the graces of language, my heart, rather than my words, must thank you," replied the

stranger. "May your blessing be prophetic! Hitherto, I trust my youth has been unsullied by any gross crime, though I have unwittingly been guilty of disobedience. But for honour, father, it is not easily wooed to grace the crest of the unknown and unfriended: can I therefore merit respectability, I must be content, and trust in that Power who gave me being, to make my life such as may insure peace beyond it. Pardon me, father; I have insensibly strayed from the business I came here to execute. These papers," continued he, drawing a packet from his bosom and presenting it, "were entrusted to me to deliver to your own hand, and from my heart I rejoice that I have succeeded in my errand."

The friar received the parcel. His opinion and counsel were often requested by many at a considerable distance from his dwelling, and he had no doubt but the present was on business of similar

lar import. It was carefully sealed with the impression of a cross, and addressed in the following manner:—

"*Sister Adelaide, superior of the convent of the Holy Virgin, near Bremen, to her honoured brother, the holy Franciscan, Austin, greeting.*"

Austin's eyes glanced on the direction, but he read it not, for suddenly the hand of death appeared to strike him—his features assumed a ghastly paleness, an universal tremor shook his whole frame, the drops of cold perspiration hung upon his hollow and careworn cheeks, the packet fell from his unnerved grasp, and, with a deep and heartrending groan, he fell upon the rocky flooring of his cell. Surprised and terrified, the youth hastened to his assistance; with manly vigour he raised him in his arms, and placed him upon the rushes on one side the cave, where, using such means as were in his power, as rubbing his temples and loosening

his vest, he at length had the satisfaction to find returning life beam in his yet half-closed eyes, and tinge his pallid cheek. Recalled to recollection, the attention of the youth was not lost upon the friar.

"Alas, my son!" said he, "I am not worthy your care: the sins of my youth deservedly punish my later years. By my example take warning: vice is a serpent, whose sting is never to be overcome; like a wound cicatrized, but not healed, it bleeds afresh upon every occasion, and inflicts upon the guilty soul sufferings which all the malice of men or devils can never inflict upon the innocent."

"Father," replied the youth, still kneeling on the rushes by his side, "you are injurious to yourself. In answer to my inquiries for you, even at the village, added to what I had heard before, they said your life was holiness itself, and that you had resided in this solitude

fourteen

fourteen or fifteen years. At that period you must have been young: youth is prone to error, which doubtless the sanctity of so many years must have obliterated."

"Look at these hands, young man," answered the friar, wildly: "the whole ocean is too small to wash them clean."

"The ocean, father, is bounded," replied the youth, modestly, "but the mercy of Heaven is unbounded."

"You say true," interrupted Austin; "therefore let us pray. Give me your hand; I will rise. Prayer will calm this tempest that destroys me."

Austin, as he spoke, by the assistance of the youth arose; but his agitation was still so great, that if he had not knelt he must have fallen. He remained a considerable time in fervent but silent prayer, the youth kneeling piously by his side, when at length rising, though feebly, he said, with calmness—"Grace be to Heaven! I am once more myself.

I grieve, good youth, to give you so unworthy a welcome: but forget it not—it is the tribute of sin; let it prove a beacon to warn your youth to avoid it. I pray you, now reach me the packet: the saints inspire me with fortitude to peruse it! My sufferings are many, but they are deserved."

The stranger again presented the packet, but the hand of Austin was as yet too unsteady to remove the envelope; he however, with a fervour that astonished the youth, pressed it first to his lips and then to his heart.—"Reverenced be what it contains," said he, "though it should be a curse!" Then with a degree of forced courage he tore it open, and read as follows:—

"Sister Adelaide, though not personally known to the Franciscan Austin, is not a stranger to his virtues. Distant, like himself, from a vain and turbulent world, she contemplates with horror the past, and bows with gratitude to the all-

wise

wise Power who has placed her in safety from the danger. That there were earthly affections, once so dear to her that they weakened every other, and left to her God a divided heart, she now confesses with contrition, and prays only for power to fulfil those duties which the sacred vow that banished her from the world enjoins her to keep——"

The friar groaned, and for some time, his eyes raised to heaven, appeared even to forget what he had been perusing; at length resuming it, he continued—

"The shipwrecked mariner, snatched from the storm, must yet feel for those condemned to buffet with its violence; and thus, father, do I feel for two helpless females, whom I understand you have for years favoured with your prayers and counsel—need I say, the daughter of William Fitzwalter, and her trusty friend, the virtuous Alice? the unhappy situation of both of whom I have learned by means of the young and deserving

Isabel

Isabel Fitzwalter, who has for some months been an inmate at this house, with a daughter of the count De Ranstadt. Her ingenuous disposition and affectionate manner have won my heart; in my breast she has confided her secrets and sorrows, and among the latter, her distress for the situation of Margaret Fitzwalter and the dame Alice, pointing yourself out as the only means by which I could serve them. What I would therefore request is, that you would offer to them my services, and an asylum such as I myself possess. From Isabel's disjointed account I also learn, that a report is spread that Margaret is not the legitimate child of William Fitzwalter —a falsehood I can refute, as I have proof in my hands to the contrary, as the youth who brings these dispatches can ascertain. He is also entrusted by Isabel with letters to Margaret and dame Alice, which you will have the goodness to deliver, and if opportunity serves, remit

mit the answers by the same messenger. In the mean while, that God may have you in his holy keeping is the prayer of

"ADELAIDE,

"*Abbess of St. Mary's, Bremen.*"

This letter was not read without frequent interruptions, and an emotion which, though it inspired the youth with wonder, inspired him also with pity. Like Margaret, he surmised that the friar in his youth had loved some one at the convent of St. Mary; and what one so probable as Adelaide, whom, though past the flower of her age, he had himself contemplated with a degree of admiration and respect beyond any woman he had ever yet seen? This idea was however soon put to flight, for Austin, somewhat recovered, reaching him the letter, bade him read it, after which they would talk further. By this he found the friar and the abbess were strangers

to

to each other, and his vague conjectures were instantly banished. The father, though the effects of his emotion were still discernible, did not neglect the duties of hospitality. He placed before his guest such food as his cell afforded, and though he did not himself set the example, pressed him to eat with an earnestness that bespoke his welcome.

The repast ended, resuming the subject that had brought the youth to England, the friar said, though his voice faltered as he spoke—"I think the noble-minded abbess refers me to you for a knowledge of proofs of Margaret's legitimacy: I can by no means conjecture how she, or much more you, can possess any thing satisfactory on the subject. 'Tis true," continued he, "that the lady Blanch, wife of Fitzwalter, lies buried in that convent—but that is no proof. We have indeed two witnesses; but they were known friends and vassals to the parties, consequently their evidence may

be

be disputed. What we have long in vain sought after is two priests—the one who married William Fitzwalter to Blanch, the other who took her last confession——"

"And whose name was John," interrupted the youth: "he was confessor to St. Mary's convent—a good and virtuous man, who, influenced by a dream, in his old age went to Palestine, where he died."

Austin regarded his guest for a moment in silent wonder.—"Young man," at length said he, "your whole appearance, your speech, your errand, your knowledge of what so few are acquainted with, astonish me: yet I well know, from undeniable evidence, you are no impostor, and that the abbess of St. Mary's truly sent you; yet have I my doubts that you are not what you seem. Does not that peasant's garb conceal one who may hereafter aspire to the highest honours (excluding royalty) of the German

man empire? The cast of your countenance too is, methinks, familiar to me, and I mistake grossly if the son of the count De Hoffman is not now before me."

"Father," answered the youth, "I trust that we may be better acquainted, and that as your knowledge of me increases, you may form a juster estimate of my deserts than you have of my quality. In truth, reverend sir, I am neither more nor less than what I seem—a peasant born and educated, my name Leopold, the humble friend of the gallant youth you mistake me for, a devoted servant of the abbess of St. Mary's, and equally at command of yourself, holy father."

The friar sighed.—"Your features," replied he, "bear a stamp of probity that I cannot, if I would, dispute. The count De Hoffman, or I judge too hastily, would suffer no disgrace by calling you his son. Sudden prepossessions should

should not, however, be blindly yielded to. We will some time talk further, for I candidly own that I am lost in a labyrinth of conjecture."

"And which cannot be dispelled, father, unless you will condescend to listen to a narrative of my uninteresting life; therefore, to-morrow, if you will give me an hour's attention, I will explain how I obtained the small knowledge I possess, and also how I became honoured with the noble Adelaide's commission."

Gladly would the father have foregone sleep, to listen to a youth that had so greatly interested him; but to breathe such a wish to a weary guest was a breach of hospitality his humanity would not suffer him to commit; he therefore expressed his thanks for his offered confidence, and prepared some rushes that lay in one corner of the cave for him to repose his wearied limbs.

The

The youth received the friar's attention with respect, and after joining him in his orisons, retired to rest.

END OF VOL. I.

Printed by J. Darling, Leadenhall-Street, London.